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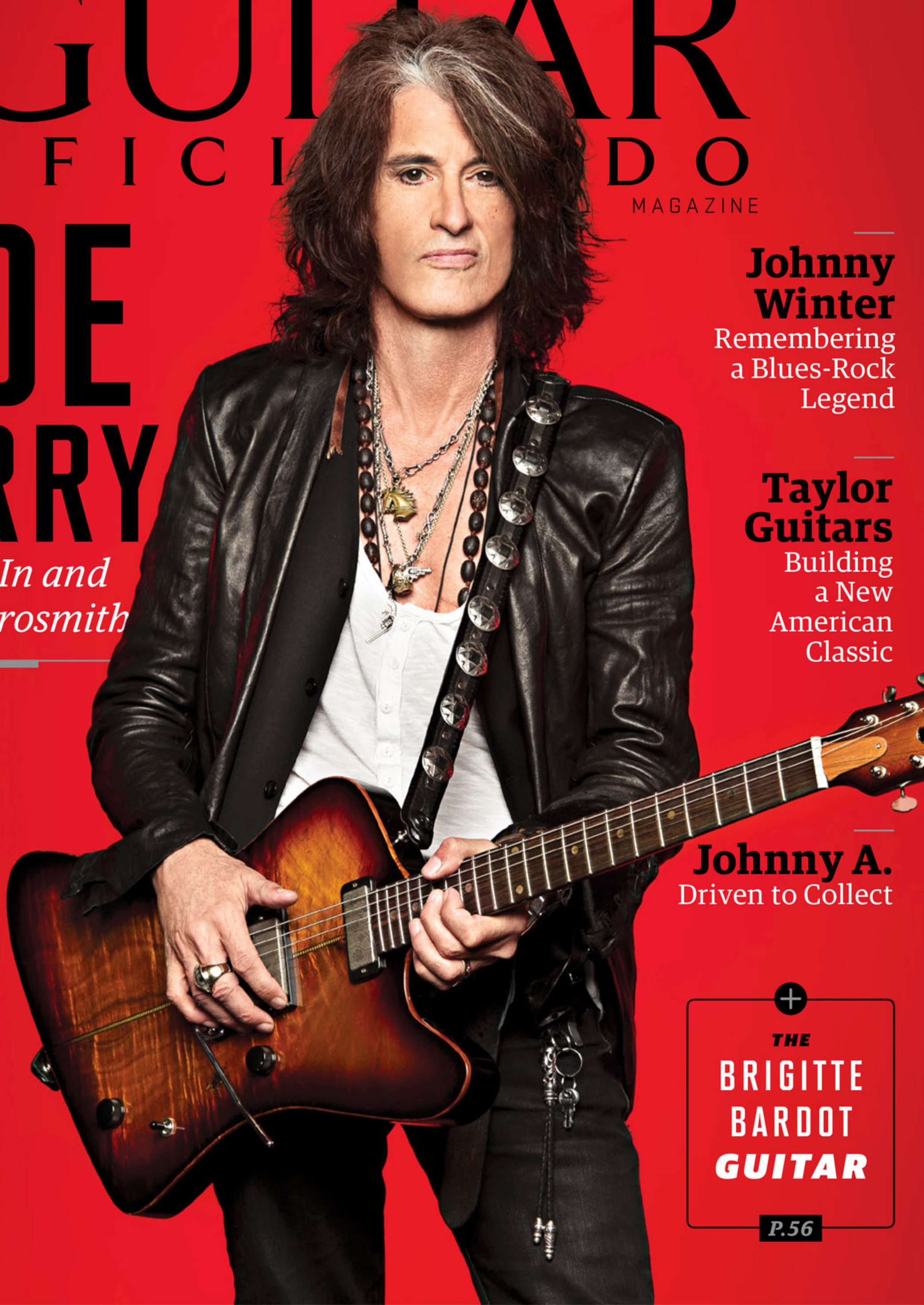
FROM SPIRITS TO STOMP BOXES

GUITAR AFICIONADO

MAGAZINE

JOE PERRY

His Life In and Out of Aerosmith



Johnny Winter
Remembering a Blues-Rock Legend

Taylor Guitars
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Johnny A.
Driven to Collect

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MARTIN D-28 AUTHENTIC 1937

WATCHES
TIME TO GIVE

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+ *THE* BRIGITTE BARDOT *GUITAR*

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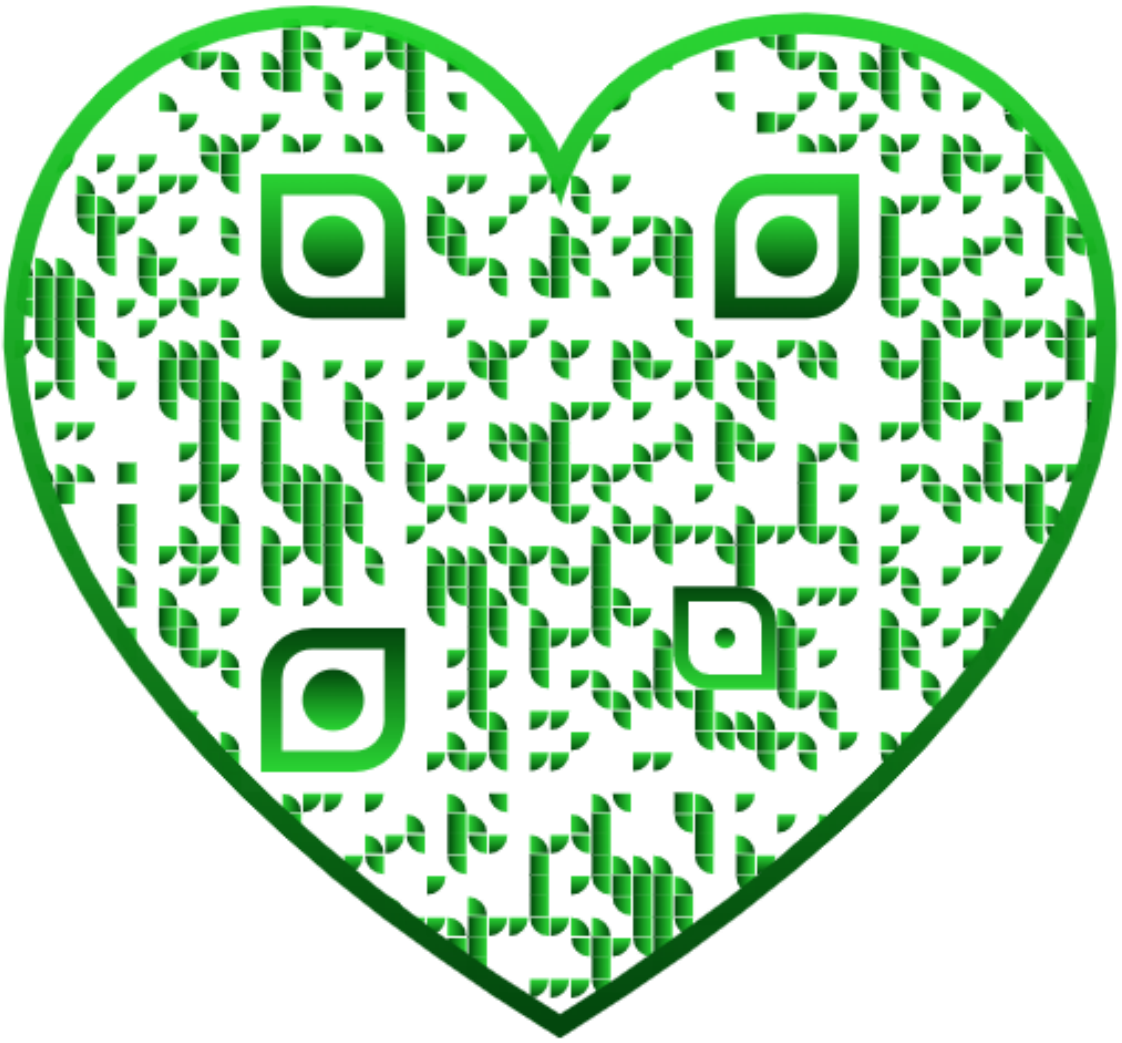

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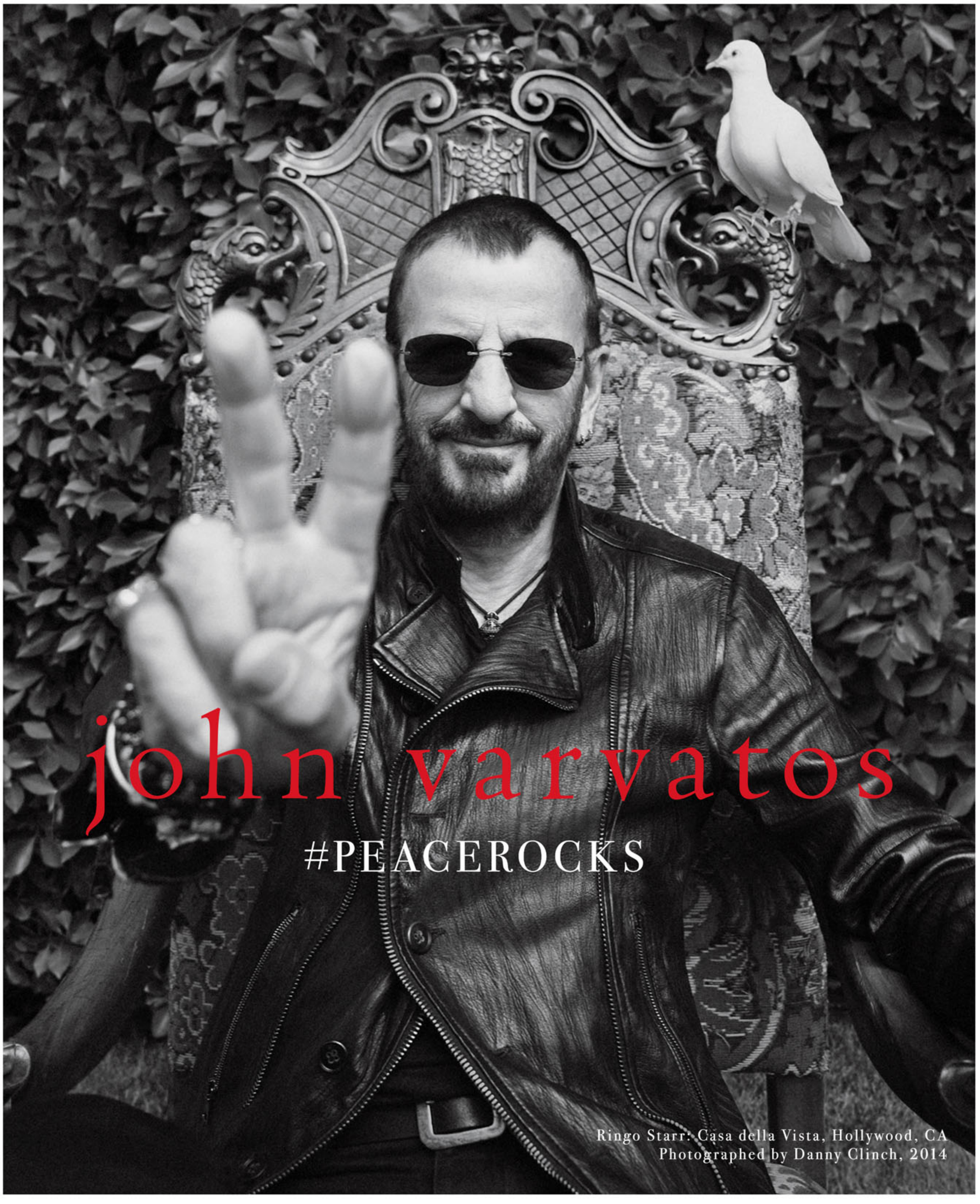
Joe Perry with his Wandre/Davoli BB

COVER PHOTO BY **ROSS HALFIN**

ROSS HALFIN; HAIR AND MAKE UP BY BYRONY BLAKE



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THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

The work of commercial and editorial photographer **Ty Milford** trends toward optimistically oriented moments filled with movement and emotion. Milford grew up in the Georgia O'Keeffe country of northern New Mexico and is a self-proclaimed lover of architecture and design, as well as a vintage Porsche fanatic. For this issue, he turned his lens toward Jay Somers and his Willamette Valley winery, J. Christopher Wines. "One of the best things about my job is getting glimpses into worlds that I know nothing about," Milford says. "Spending an afternoon with Jay and learning about his life and work as a winemaker and musician was fantastic. I'm so hooked, I've already got plans to go back out and watch the harvest and grape crushing."

Peter Makowski, who wrote this issue's cover feature on Joe Perry, has interviewed the Aerosmith guitarist many times over the years. "Joe is a pleasure to interview," Makowski says. "He's thoughtful, humble, and shoots from the hip, very similar to Jeff Beck and Ritchie Blackmore." The last time they spoke was in Abu Dhabi in 2009, when it looked like Aerosmith were on the verge of splitting up, a time that is documented in Joe's new autobiography, *Rocks: My Life In and Out of Aerosmith*. Makowski came to this latest interview bearing gifts, including an illustrated history of guns, which Perry, an avid gun collector, eagerly leafed through. "Gun ban? Not on my watch!" the guitarist declared with a mischievous grin, setting the tone for a marathon five-hour interview.

Larry Marano, who shot this issue's Collector's Soul photo of Dark Horse Flyer guitarist Scott Lane, has been honing his art for more than 30 years. Originally from New York City, Marano spent his youth scoring tickets to shows at Madison Square Garden, the Palladium, the Cat Club, the Ritz, CBGB, L'Amour, and Sundance. As his passion for photography grew, he turned his camera on the performers themselves. "Growing up, I was always intrigued by the way these rockers looked onstage," Marano says. "Then, as I became interested in photography, the camera led me back to the concerts that I loved going to." Marano's work on behalf of Getty Images has appeared internationally in publications such as *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* and on web sites for the *Guardian* U.K., *US Weekly*, *InStyle*, *USA Today*, and others.

Trent Bell, who shot this issue's feature on Johnny A., got his masters in architecture from Andrews University and practiced in the field for a few years before he decided he was better suited to photography. Since then, he has built a portfolio that includes photography for commercial and residential architecture firms as well as for media clients that include the *New York Times*, Condé Nast, and the *Boston Globe*. "We had a great time with Johnny and were blown away by his beautiful guitar collection," Bell says. "His passion for guitars is obvious when working with him, and the depth of his collection is rather incredible. He was a gracious host and was open and willing to do what it took to get the shot." Bell's portfolio can be viewed at trentbell.com.

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LETTER *from the* EDITOR

MOST OF MY EARLY MUSIC education took place during the Seventies, when I was a teenager. During the early and mid Seventies, my musical tastes gravitated toward hard rock, but as I began to read about the styles of music and the musicians that inspired my guitar heroes, I began to broaden my horizons. Numerous bands, from the Allman Brothers to ZZ Top, introduced me to the blues, but my first true experience with one of the great founding fore-fathers of the genre was when I heard Muddy Waters' *Hard Again* album.

Admittedly, a big reason why I bought that album was because it was produced by one of my heroes, Johnny Winter. My appreciation for authentic, deep blues was further developed a few months later when Winter released his *Nothin' But the Blues* album. At that point I was hooked, and I began to seek the early original recordings by blues artists like Waters, Robert Johnson, Howlin' Wolf, John Lee Hooker, and T-Bone Walker, both so I could understand where my favorite guitarists were coming from and to help myself determine where I wanted to go as a player.

I casually kept track of Winter's work during the Eighties and Nineties, and I'd occasionally go to see him perform if I happened to notice he was playing a gig near me. His guitar playing was always inspiring and intense, even during the later performances I caught, where he played sitting down due to his deteriorating health.

The last time I saw Winter play live was in 1997, but the last time I actually saw him was back in April, when we both were on the same flight from Tokyo's Narita airport to Newark. I didn't want to bother Johnny as he waited to board the flight, but I told myself I'd go see his show and try to say hello the next time he came to New York City. Unfortunately, I didn't have the chance, as Johnny passed away a few months later.

Our tribute to Winter can be found on page 70, but I also highly recommend his final album, *Step Back*. It's like a condensed encyclopedia of the blues, featuring stunning guest appearances by fellow luminaries like Eric Clapton, Billy Gibbons, and this issue's cover subject, Joe Perry. As impressive as the guest lineup is, Winter's fiery playing steals the spotlight. I'm hoping that *Step Back* will inspire a new generation the way that *Nothin' But the Blues* inspired me. Long may Johnny's light shine bright.

CHRIS GILL
Editor-in-Chief

WATCH DOGS

That John Varvatos watch on your cover is absolutely gorgeous! [*Sept/Oct 2014*] And seeing as I own a Dobro D-100 Californian Electric Resonator–the very guitar that inspired John's watch–I can't wait to get one of those babies on my wrist. Can I get my name on the wait list?

—Barry Logano
Waterford, Michigan

After getting your special watch issue, all I can say is–Wow! From the amazing story about the watch inspired by a guitar to the pieces on watch hounds like Ron Wood and Elliot Easton, this was definitely one of my favorite issues of *Guitar Aficionado*. I've always loved that your magazine includes watches–because what guitarist doesn't want something amazing wrapped around his wrist while he's peeling off some hot licks? I have my own small collection of prized watches, including a Patek Philippe Aquanaut Travel Time and a big and blingy Hublot Big Bang King with diamonds that I wear out for special performances. The way it catches the stage lights is a performance all on its own. My thanks for a great issue and a great magazine.

—Thomas C. Breyer
Chicago, Illinois

GEORGE STRAIGHT

Loved the piece on Gretsch's Custom Shop. [*Sept/Oct 2014*] I'm so glad to see the old brands are still going strong. Probably needless to say but as a child of the Sixties I first got turned on to Gretsch via George Harrison, who was and still is my go-to guitarist for style and tone. I bought a brand-new Gretsch Chet Atkins Tennessean sometime around 1967, which I still have. In the Seventies, when my law practice took off, I started investing more heavily in my guitar collection and picked up a Country Gent and a Duo Jet, also because of George. Those guitars brought me some of the greatest joy in my off hours from the office. Now that I'm retired, I'm giving them a workout every day. For me, nothing beats a Gretsch.

—Angelo Victor Debarro
Fountain Hills, Arizona

FAB ISSUE

Beatles collector Sam Irlander is a man after my own heart. I've also picked up a few guitars and amps over the years because of their Beatles connections, including a 1965 Epiphone Casino and a Vox AC-100. Now if only I could get my hands on a real Beatles piece of gear!

—John Patterson
Coconut Grove, Florida

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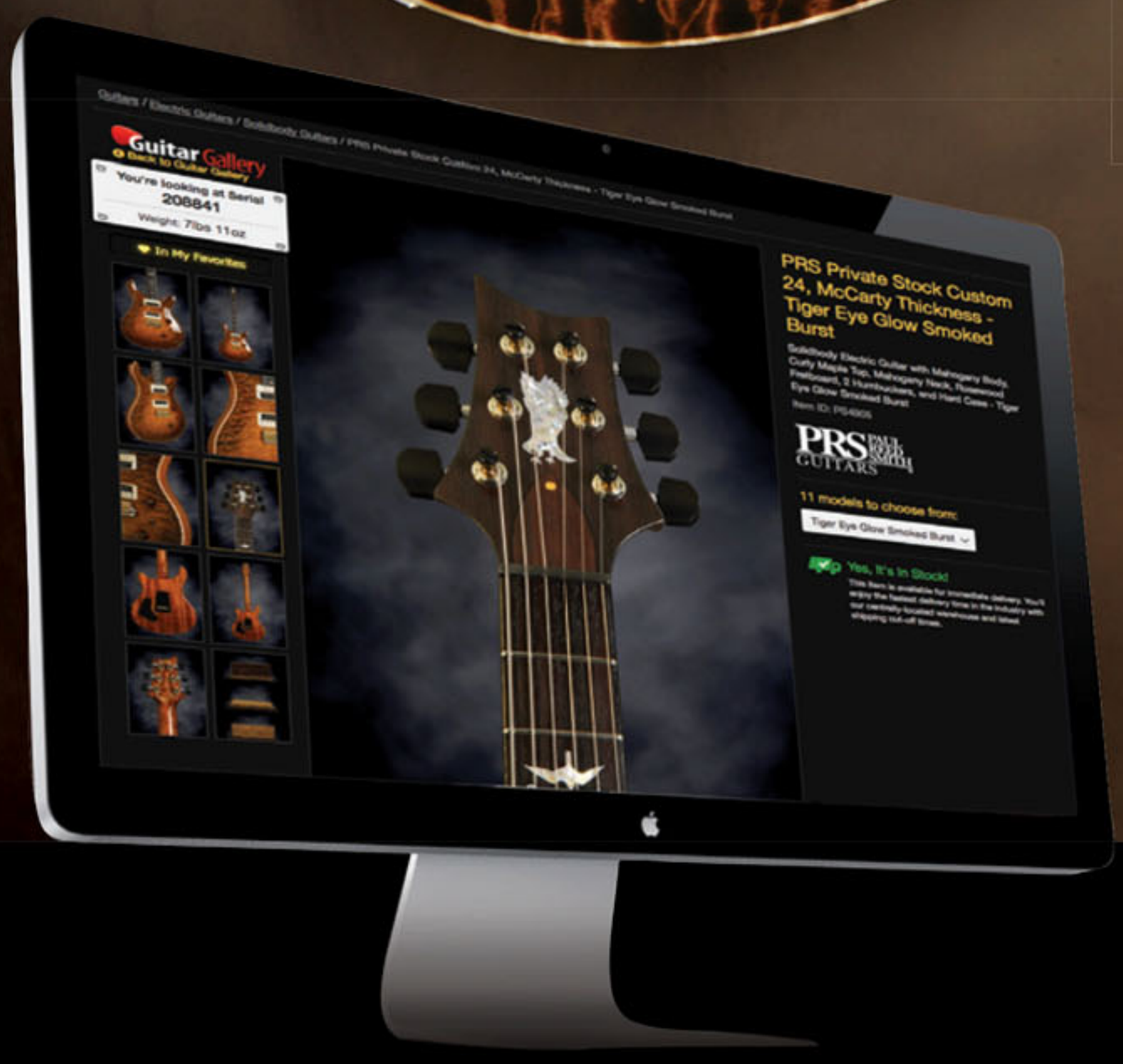

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY
MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

NEW + COOL GUITAR

THIRTIES ROCK

HUSS AND DALTON DS-12 CROSSROADS

{ BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK }

IN 1995, JEFF HUSS and Mark Dalton, two bluegrass and traditional music aficionados who had logged time at Stelling Banjo Works, began building premium acoustic guitars out of Huss's garage near Staunton, Virginia. Today, the Huss and Dalton Guitar Company is a bit bigger, but not much—it currently boasts eight employees and still operates out of Staunton. While the company has demonstrated some outside-the-box thinking—some models feature bolt-on necks for better serviceability and wood-to-wood contact, as well as tops with a built-in 25-inch radius for boosted midrange—it is best known for crafting superior, high-end instruments that often hark back to classic acoustic guitar designs.

To that end, Huss and Dalton has seen much recent success with the Crossroads, the company's take on Gibson's

"WE'VE THOUGHT FOR A LONG TIME THAT THE L-00 STYLE GUITARS WERE REALLY COOL."

JEFF HUSS

famed Thirties-era blues box, the L-00. Like its source, the Crossroads is a small and simply appointed instrument that, due to its size and light weight, boasts a bright and lively tone. "The idea was to capture that affordable, working-man's, classically but not ornately appointed instrument," Jeff Huss says. "We didn't know what it was going to do, but we built the Crossroads and put it out there, and it went like hotcakes."

Now, Huss and Dalton has introduced a new version of the guitar, the DS-12 Crossroads, which adds two more classic acoustic designs into the mix: a slope-shouldered, larger dreadnought body style like those found on models in Huss and Dalton's DS line (and which, Huss says, is "an homage to an old Gibson J-45 or -35"), and a neck that joins the body at the 12th fret (paying respect to, Huss says, "the Roy Smeck-style 12-fret Gibsons").

While a DS version of the Crossroads had existed previously, this new model represents the first 12-fret iteration of the guitar. "We decided to do it because most Gibson L-0, L-00, L-1, and L-2 flattops were 12-fret models early on," Huss explains. The change in where the neck meets the body results in the guitar's bridge being moved "down into the wider part of the bout," he continues. "So the instrument has that open, dry sound that old Gibsons have, which is what we wanted to capture."

The DS-12 Crossroads features AAA-grade mahogany back and sides (Indian rosewood optional) and a Sitka spruce top, with a beautiful Vintage Sunburst finish. The top is supported by a scalloped X-style bracing crafted from Appalachian red spruce, a Huss and Dalton standard. "It's a really stiff wood when it's quarter sawn, but it's extremely light," Huss says. "You can thin it down and still maintain the stiffness that you need." Indeed, the bracing in the DS-12 is thinned to help achieve that classic L-style responsiveness. "Those Gibsons were extremely lightly braced guitars," Huss says. "Because of that, very few early L-0 and L-00 guitars have survived. We're not as light as those, but we're still pretty light."

Other features on the DS-12 include a 1 3/4–inch vintage taper mahogany neck with matte finish, Indian rosewood fingerboard and bridge, bone nut, Gotoh TK-0700 tuning machines, and Honduran rosewood bridge plate. Several appointments also lend the guitar an appropriately classic L-00 look: simple pearl dot inlays, crème plastic binding, a black/white/black rosette, a "Crossroads" headstock (which resembles an old Gibson peg head), and an eye-catching fire-stripe pickguard.

The result is a visually arresting package and one that, through the incorporation of the 12-fret design and lightly braced DS-size body, offers remarkably crisp and responsive tone. "It's very different from the Martin-style guitars that we build, which have that big, whomping bass," Huss says of the DS-12 Crossroads. "There's great articulation all across the spectrum." According to Huss, the Crossroads line has of late become a best seller for the company. As a result, Huss and Dalton is continuing to expand upon what has been a very successful design. "Next up, we're going to be building a 12-fret version of the standard Crossroads, just because of the amazing response we've had," he says. "So we'll keep experimenting. We've thought for a long time that the L-00 style guitars were really cool. Now it seems like people are starting to agree with us."

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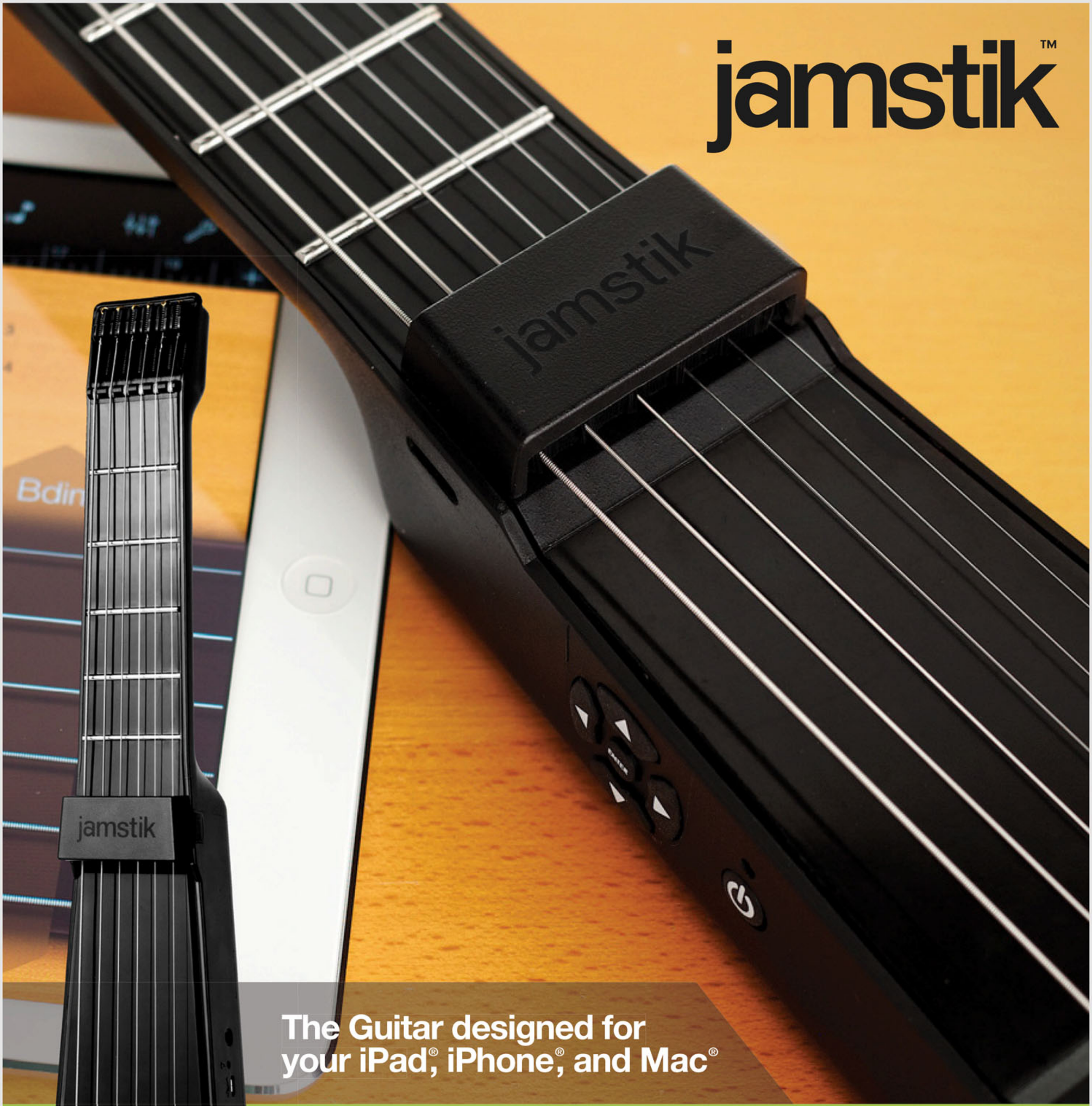

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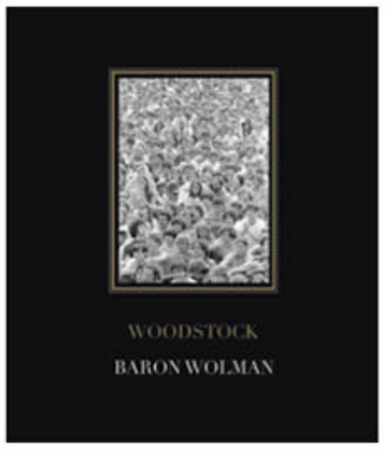

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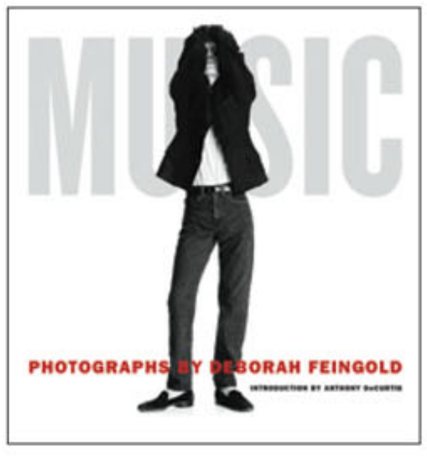

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{ BY DEBORAH FEINGOLD }

OVER THE PAST three decades, photographer Deborah Feingold has shot some of the most famous musicians, actors, authors, and political leaders of our time. *Deborah Feingold: Music* focuses on her portraits of musicians, providing a survey of iconic figures across the genres. The book includes her photos of Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Prince, Bono, Chet Baker, James Brown, Joey Ramone, Madonna, and Pharrell Williams, along with bands such as the Replacements, the Beastie Boys, R.E.M., and numerous others.

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REAL STEEL

THOMAS KELLER'S ALL-CLAD TK COLLECTION

{ By MICHAEL COLAMECO }

ONE OF THE questions I'm most frequently asked about cooking has to do with the cookware itself. It seems that everybody is obsessed with pots and pans these days, and there is no shortage of options available in stores and online.

When I heard that the great American chef Thomas Keller had partnered with the famed Pennsylvania-based cookware manufacturer All-Clad for a new signature line called the TK Collection, I had to learn more. I've filmed episodes for my PBS series in Keller's restaurant kitchens at both the French Laundry, in Yountville, California, and Per Se, in Manhattan, and I can vouch that the chef uses All-Clad cookware in both locations.

All-Clad started in 1967 as a company called Clad Metals that was in the business of formulating bonded metals for a wide variety of industrial uses. A few years later, in 1971, when the name morphed into All-Clad Metal Crafters, the company began concentrating on making high-end cookware for professional kitchens and consumers alike.

For the TK Collection, All-Clad uses a proprietary blend of stainless steel, copper, and aluminum to forge pans with custom-designed shapes and features that deliver peak performance. The shapes are relatively uniform, which allows a few universal lids to work for many of the pot and pan sizes offered.

Stainless steel is an iron-based blended alloy, and most high-end stainless steel used for restaurant cookware is referred to as 18/10, as the steel blend contains 18 percent chromium and 10 percent nickel wrapped around an aluminum core. Most restaurants that can't afford 18/10 use pots and pans made of 100 percent aluminum, but these tend to warp from heat due to aluminum's relative softness. They also react to many acids and don't clean up nearly as well. While stainless steel is very durable, non-reactive, and easy to clean, it's a very poor conductor of heat, unlike aluminum. Pure stainless-steel pans are prone to hot spots, so the blend of metals used as the core and how far that blended core extends up the sides of the pans will determine how well they are made and perform. Accordingly, it will dictate their price.

For the TK line, All-Clad blends both copper and aluminum at the core for superior thermal conductivity and then wraps that core all the way around the base and up the sides. This prevents the common fault of many pans that burn and blacken foods and sauces at the point where they angle up from the blended metal base into the nonblended side portions, as high flames tend to curl up and around that bottom lip of the pan. The TK line's pan handles have a custom ergonomic design, and certain pans have flared lips that enable drip-free pouring. The round lids feature long, stem-like handles for ease of use over the stove and easy storage as well.

All-Clad TK Collection products can be purchased individually through Williams-Sonoma, starting at $44.95, or in four-, seven-, and you'll-never-ever-need-another-pan 11-piece sets ($1,599.95). If you're seeking a gift for that special person in your life that loves cooking, look no further.

New York City–based chef and media personality Michael Colameco is the author of *Mike Colameco's Food Lover's Guide to NYC* and hosts *Colameco's Food Show* on PBS and the nationally syndicated radio program *Weekend Food*.

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Unwavering: a solid word that voices commitment to achievement regardless of how difficult the challenge and how long it may take to succeed. It's one of the things that the 1959 Les Paul and Brad Whitford have in common. Both the introduction of the '59 Les Paul and the early days of Aerosmith were challenges to say the least. However, in both cases, time proved that commitment can outwait opinion and that talent and craft are undeniable. When Brad offered up his original 1959 Les Paul to join the elite company of Collector's Choice guitars, it resonated on many levels. Not the least of those was the fact that Brad's original Les Paul is an absolute tone-monster and a guitar of exceptional feel and road-worn patina. Collector's Choice #26 is a run of no more than 300 replicas of Brad Whitford's original 1959 Les Paul #9-0653, dubbed"The Brad Whitford 'Burst" by the Gibson Custom team.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LARRY MARANO

Scott Lane in the guitar vault that holds his more than 100 guitars, including Gibsons, Fenders, and a host of custom instruments.

AIR FORCE

DARK HORSE FLYER'S SCOTT LANE OPENS HIS VAULT OF INSPIRATIONAL GUITARS.

AS CO-SONGWRITER AND guitarist for the Florida-based rock band Dark Horse Flyer, Scott Lane is a supportive creative force. Guitars and music remained a personal pursuit of his since he was a youngster, but for almost four decades Scott chose the path of corporate life before he rekindled his love of music, songwriting, and guitar playing in 2011 as a founding member of Dark Horse Flyer. The group's debut album, *Breakaway*, will be released September 30.

Q How did you start collecting guitars?

My passion for guitars began when I was nine years old, when my father asked me if I would like to learn to play the guitar. "Yes," was my answer, of course, and so began my relationship with guitars that has lasted me a lifetime. Serious collecting came much later in my life, but I always had three or four guitars with me at all times growing up.

Q What do you look for in a guitar?

Inspiration! I am a big believer that guitars are works of art. Some works, like those from the finest luthiers, are really spectacular. Guitars are an art, and that can encourage the creation of other art in the form of song and music. It's that synergy that inspires me to play and to create songs. Guitars inspire me to create.

Q How do guitars fit in with the design aesthetics of your home?

My home is also Dark Horse Flyer's rehearsal studio, so guitars are just part of the fabric of my life and home, whether in the rehearsal studio, in other parts of my home, or in the guitar vault. You'll know you're in a guitar aficionado's home the moment you walk in.

Q What was the first major purchase you made for your collection?

It was my first James Olson James Taylor Signature SJ acoustic. Just an unbelievable acoustic guitar! The tonal qualities, the craftsmanship, and the inspirational factor all in one beautiful instrument, handcrafted by a really good friend.

Q What are some of the other guitars in your collection?

I have several great vintage Gibson and Fender guitars in my collection, but I'm mainly a proponent of seeking out the best luthiers for custom-made guitars. I have many fantastic guitars from James Olson, Jeff Traugott, John Buscarino, Ken Parker Archtops, Ervin Somogyi, and Kevin Ryan as well as Jason Kostal acoustic/electric guitars and many electrics from Taku Sakashta, Collings, Johan Gustavsson, Lentz Reserve, Ruokangas, Suhr, Sadowsky, Tom Anderson, Marchione, Rick Turner, Nik Huber, Paul Reed Smith Private Stock, Thorn, and Duesenberg. I have well over 100 guitars in total, and I also have bass guitars, lap steels, Dobros, mandolins, and a ukulele.

Q Which is your favorite, and why?

Tough question, as I truly do have many favorites. If I had to pick only one, it would be my Ken Parker Archtops Inner Peace. That guitar is a work of art, design, and engineering. I am drawn to it daily as a source of inspiration and enjoyment. It's simply a fantastic instrument, made by a really good friend.

Q What is your dream purchase?

One day I would love to own an instrument that was previously cherished and shared by a famous songwriter of my lifetime, like Neil Young cherishes his D-28 that was originally owned by Hank Williams Sr. I would like to have that type of good fortune one day.

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Shown from left to right - McCarty, Brent Mason, McCarty Singlecut and Violin II (featured). Private Stock models not shown include our line of artist signature acoustics and the Gary Grainger signature bass.

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JOHNNY A. RECORDED HIS LATEST ALBUM, **DRIVEN**, WITH A STUNNING COLLECTION OF GUITARS.

“This is the very first electric guitar I bought with my own money,”

by Mac Randall

by Trent Bell

Johnny A. says proudly, grabbing a compact, off-white 1964 Vox Clubman from a stand and twanging out a few unamplified notes. He’s standing in the luxuriously appointed basement of his house, just north of Boston, dressed in shades, a white linen shirt with light-blue stripes, black jeans, and Beatle boots. Behind him is a plush lounge area with a pool table and a well-stocked bar (he’s fond of Scotch). Skull-shaped shot glasses stand at regular intervals on the granite countertop. In front of him is the comfortable studio space, dominated by an SSL console, where the rocker recorded and mixed the entirety of his latest instrumental album, *Driven*.

“It was 1965 and I was 12 years old,” Johnny recalls as he strums the Clubman. “I’d been playing guitar for about a year. Before that, I was a drummer. My aunt ran a beauty salon in Medford, Massachusetts, and right down the street from it was a music store. One day, I looked in the window and there was this Vox. I wanted it, but it cost $88, so I ended up sweeping the hair clippings in my aunt’s salon every Saturday until I had

> THE GUITARS I HAVE NOW ARE **ALL THE GUITARS I WANT,** AND THE REASON I HAVE THEM HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THEIR WORTH."

enough money to get it. I'd go into the music store every week and give the guy a few more dollars, and finally *I got the guitar*. And you know what? I just plugged it in yesterday for the first time in years. It still sounds good!"

Johnny has picked up a few more guitars since then. He currently has about 70. "I don't think of myself as a collector," he says cautiously. "I'm an obtainer of things I want to use. Most of my vintage guitars are gone, actually. I've owned '52 Teles and L Series Strats and early Les Pauls, but I've gotten rid of all of them. The guitars I have now are all the guitars I want, and the reason I have them has nothing to do with their worth."

The core purpose of all these instruments is to serve a musical talent that has made Johnny A. a staple of the New England rock scene for decades. In the Eighties, he was a key member of the well-loved Boston band Hearts on Fire. In the Nineties, he hooked up with famed J. Geils Band singer Peter Wolf. Following his seven-year tour of duty as Wolf's guitarist and musical director, Johnny recorded an instrumental solo album, *Sometime Tuesday Morning*. One cut from it, "Oh Yeah," hit Number One on the adult alternative radio chart in 2001, the first time a non-vocal track had reached the top spot in more than 10 years. He hasn't looked back since.

"While I was on the road with Wolf," Johnny says, "I got a bad bronchial infection and my voice never came back right. So I knew I wasn't going to be a singer. For my own music, the guitar was going to have to carry the melody. But that way of thinking came naturally to me anyway. I was always drawn toward being melodic." Indeed, one hallmark of Johnny A.'s enviably fluid style—which bears strong resemblances to the playing of Jeff Beck, Chet Atkins, and Danny Gatton—is that he never lets his obvious virtuosity trample over his good taste.

This year, he celebrates the 20th anniversary of his becoming a Gibson endorsee. The relationship began in a disarmingly straightforward way: Johnny cold-called Gibson and asked if the company was looking for players to add to its roster. Gradually, he began working more closely with the Gibson Custom Shop and putting his mark on the guitars it built for him. A lovely LeGrand archtop attests to that ("I asked for Grover Imperial tuning machines, which Gibson hardly ever uses, plus a very thin spruce top and abalone inlays"), as does a pair of striking Firebirds.

"For years, I was begging them to make me a Firebird VII like the one Brian Jones used," Johnny explains. "Finally, they got [*former Gibson luthier*] Phil Jones involved, and he's a Firebird fanatic. The one thing I told him was that I didn't want a typical skinny neck. So the Custom Shop borrowed a dead-mint Firebird from a doctor down in Nashville and took all its measurements. They still didn't have any of the original lyre tailpieces, so I ended up sourcing a brand-new old-stock one from a store in Canada. The problem was that it was nickel

instead of gold. But then I somehow got hold of an original gold vibrato arm, so I took the tailpiece to a metallurgist, who stripped it and redid it in gold to match the arm. They even used the original Sixties wood sealer on it!" The result is a gorgeous reproduction of Jones' ax, which was later used as the basis for an "official" reissue model. Arguably even more stunning is another custom Firebird that Gibson CEO Henry Juszkiewicz gave Johnny in 2002—its finish is an eye-popping green marble.

Buying a 1996 ES-295 helped inspire Johnny to kick his solo career into high gear. He eventually switched to Les Pauls for live work, and he still has a bunch, including a 1969 sunburst (originally a gold-top) signed by Les Paul, a fetching 2001 Cadillac Green model with a Mary Ford–style pickguard (the finish color was sampled from a 1955 Gretsch), and a 2002 pink *Playboy* design commissioned for a Playmate of the Year photo shoot. (It given to him by Gibson's Rick Gembar at the request of Johnny's daughter: "She was a preteen and couldn't even play guitar," Johnny says, "but she liked the look of it.") Still, he grew to miss the distinctive hollowbody tone of his 295 onstage. Eventually, he and Gibson jointly decided to develop his own signature guitar, combining his favorite traits of both archtops and solidbodies.

1 1964 Vox Clubman

2 Johnny's custom Gibson LeGrand archtop

3 A custom Firebird given to Johnny by Gibson CEO Henry Juszkiewicz

4 1960 Skylark lap steel

Gibson Johnny A. signature models, many in custom sparkle finishes

First sold to the public in 2003, the Gibson Johnny A. Signature has a maple top with scimitar-shaped f-holes, quarter-sawn mahogany neck with 25 1/2-inch scale, two humbuckers, and a Bigsby vibrato (a crucial element in Johnny's playing style—"It just has a certain girth to it," he says). He owns about 30 of them, mostly one-offs, including the prototype, the first official model built, and a few with finishes so fluorescent and sparkly you'd need sunglasses to look at them in the right light. "What can I say?" he says, chuckling. "I'm a child of the Sixties. I like sparkles."

Among Johnny's many other notable Gibsons are a 1936 L-00 (a Christmas present from his wife and daughter), a 1966 EB-0 bass, a custom Johnny A. Montana Advanced Jumbo with breathtaking woodwork, and a pink-and-white 1960 Skylark lap steel. But his collection doesn't revolve around just Gibsons. He also has a few Fenders, including a 1997 Telecaster Bajo Sexto and a James Burton Tele that he picked up during a 2005 appearance at Burton's first International Guitar Festival in Shreveport, Louisiana. It's signed by all the festival participants, including Burton, Steve Cropper, Brad Paisley, and Jerry Donahue. "They passed these guitars around for us to sign, and we thought they were going to be auctioned off or something," he says. "Then at the end, James gave one of them to each artist on the bill!"

Elsewhere in the studio space are a recent-vintage Rickenbacker 360-12, a Jersey Girl electric with distinctive maple control knobs, a purple sparkle–finish Washburn acoustic/electric allegedly built for Prince to use on the 1984 *Purple Rain* tour, a 1993 Martin D-28 ("That guitar's a cannon"), a rare three-pickup Silvertone from the Sixties, and a 1984 Bond Electraglide. That last guitar is a rare and bizarre Scottish-made electric model with a carbon-fiber body, graphite neck, digital controls, active electronics (which require an external power supply), and fingerboard that has no frets and resembles a staircase.

> "WHAT CAN I SAY? **I'M A CHILD OF THE SIXTIES.** I LIKE SPARKLES."

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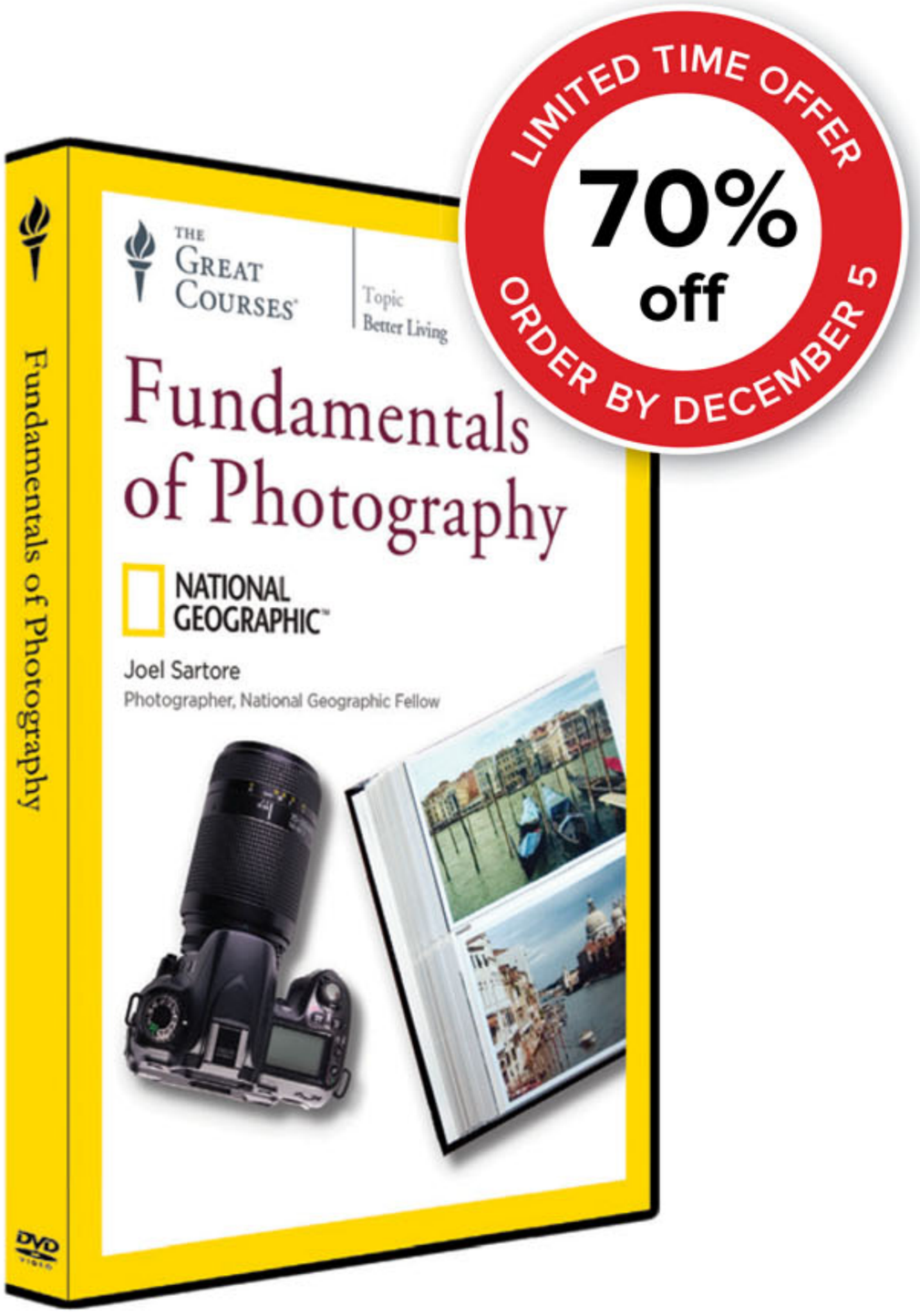

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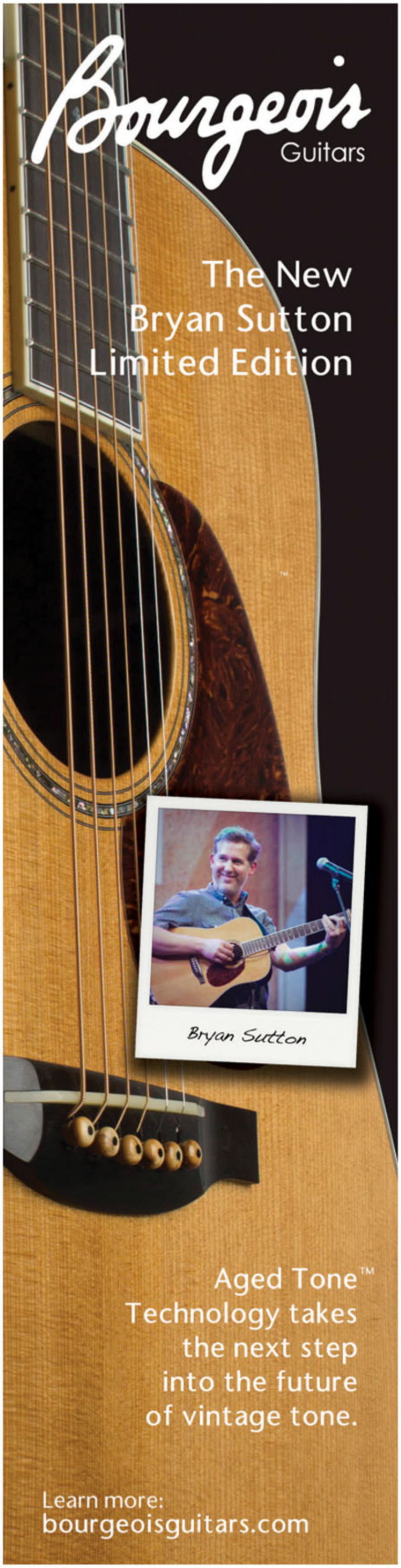

ja

JOHNNY A.

Sitting in a hardshell case nearby is a sunburst Gretsch Viking, purchased new in 1967. "I was an impatient teenager when I bought that guitar," A. says. "What I really wanted was a White Falcon, but they told me it was going to be a 13-month wait. I wasn't going to wait 13 months, so I got the Viking instead." Right next to it is a more modern Gretsch, a 2004 Golden Anniversary 6120 given to him by the company after a NAMM show.

Johnny also has a thing for Hofner basses—not just the classic 500/1 violin-style bass that will forever be associated with Paul McCartney but also the company's chunkier Club model. "I got them to make me a Club Bass just like the Sixties ones, but without the neck binding," he says. "I love it."

A choice selection of the guitars mentioned above, plus a few others, were used in the making of *Driven*, which Johnny engineered and mixed on his own, in addition to playing all the instruments. "I had never put my hands on a recording console in any kind of serious way before," he explains, "so I was learning the gear as I went along. I also had never planned to do the whole album at home, but the demos I made here sounded so good that I finally realized, I can do this. It was work, though. I took myself off the road for almost a year and concentrated on making this album for 18 months, seven days a week, 12 to 14 hours a day."

Clearly, the album's title is apt, for it describes its maker to a tee. And from the dense riffing of "Ghost" to the supercharged Sixties-style pop confection "C'mon, C'mon" to the inspired cover of the Bee Gees ballad "To Love Somebody," you can hear that the finished product was worth all that effort. "I didn't want to compromise," Johnny says, a statement that applies just as well to his method of recording as it does to the way he designs, acquires, and plays guitars. GA

5 A rare early Sixties Silvertone 1305

6 1936 Gibson L-00

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Aerosmith's turbulent history.

by PETER MAKOWSKI • photos by ROSS HALFIN

JOE PERRY IS normally a shy, humble, laconic, but intense man, who talks only when he has something to say. But on this balmy summer evening, he is in an unusually effusive mood and wants to chat, particularly when the subject of discussion is his new autobiography, Rocks—My Life In and Out of Aerosmith.

"I'm going to interview you as much as you're going to interview me!" Perry warns with a mischievous grin, momentarily letting down his somber, rock-star cool. "What do you think of the book? Does it make me sound like a bitter, pissed-off old man? Or does it sound like I made a good decision to become a rock star?"

Like his bandmate, Aerosmith lead singer Steven Tyler, Perry is a natural-born rock and roller who looks like he emerged from the womb with a long flowing mane and tattooed biceps. Although the lines on his face have gotten clearer, Perry, who is now in his early sixties, still has a remarkably trim and toned physique. Tonight, he's shed his usual junkie-chic attire of scarves, antique jewelry, and customized leather pants for a "Keef on vacation" look, consisting of a billowing white shirt opened to the waist, and blue pajama pants.

Although Aerosmith are in the midst of a European tour, Perry seems to be on permanent vacation in the Maria Callas suite at London's legendary Savoy Hotel, which is where *GA* has met up with him. A stack of weights and an exercise bike occupy one corner, and the entire suite is littered with open guitar cases, where six-stringed specimens recline like seductive vixens. The most alluring of all is a blue Wandre/Davoli BB—as in "Brigitte Bardot" [*see sidebar*]—a gift from his friend, Johnny Depp.

"We're cut from the same cloth," Perry says of his compadre. "We both love the blues and guitars."

In addition to giving Perry guitars, Depp loaned him one of his Los Angeles abodes while Perry was in town to put finishing touches on the most recent Aerosmith album, 2012's *Music from Another Dimension!* While Perry was living there, he started working on his autobiography. *Rocks—My Life In and Out of Aerosmith* is a remarkably honest story of ruin and redemption. It is also a riposte to the semiconfessional *Walk This Way*, written in 1997 by Stephen Davis, previously known for the epic Led Zeppelin bad-behavior bio *Hammer of the Gods*. The perspective of Perry's book is less self-analytical than Aerosmith drummer Joey Kramer's *Hit Hard: A Story of Hitting Rock Bottom at the Top*, and it's less self-centered than Tyler's *Does the Noise in My Head Bother You?*

"I thought that *Walk This Way* was a very bad representation of the band," Perry says. "It was entertaining, but in the end it became the template for VH1's *Behind the Music*. Every episode was 'shoot up, OD in the bathroom, get taken away in an ambulance, and then sober up.' It was the same story every time. Just the names of the players were different.

"Joey's book was basically about his interaction with Steven," Perry continues. "It was almost a self-help book. Steven's book was entertaining for Steven Tyler fans, but as far as being a true autobiography... Let's just say a lot of things in the book weren't totally accurate to what I actually saw."

While working on his autobiography, Perry read dozens of other autobiographies and found Keith Richards' *Life* and Bob Dylan's *Chronicles* particularly influential. He eventually decided to work with acclaimed biographer David Ritz, best known for his collaborations with Ray Charles and Rick James as well as his best-selling Marvin Gaye biography. After completing *Music from Another Dimension!*, Perry brought Ritz on the road with him.

"It was kind of like talking to a psychiatrist," Perry recalls. "I don't think that David realized how deep the book was going to be. It covers a lot of different characters and different relationships—all the things it took to keep the band together. The way that Aerosmith works is very complicated, and it can get frustrating, because you have to dig down and look at things that you don't want to talk about. I had to take ownership on a lot of the bullshit. I couldn't say, 'Steven did this and Joey did that,' and leave myself out, because I'm half of the story."

JOE PERRY

HAIR AND MAKE UP BY BYRONY BLAKE

JOE PERRY

Most great musical partnerships consist of yin-and-yang polar opposites, and Perry's book shows that the Toxic Twins were no exception. While Tyler's family was full of extroverts with show-business connections, Perry's own background was far more repressed and conservative.

"My parents were brought up in a very right-wing, Republican environment," Perry admits. "I lived in a cultural vacuum. The town I lived in was mostly blue-collar. My mother took me to art lessons every week, and the only music I listened to was whatever I could find on the radio. Then the Beatles came along. That became the soundtrack to my revolution."

Soon afterward, Perry discovered the Yardbirds and became inspired by their highly charged, feedback-driven homage to American blues. "When I saw Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page in the movie *Blow-Up* playing 'Stroll On,' it was the first time I had ever seen two guitars interplaying," he says. "They were using feedback and modal scales. They looked at guitar the same way as Hendrix, who I discovered a little later. It was, 'Bring on those pedals and turn this shit up!' The Yardbirds had a definite impact on me and what became Aerosmith."

"I always make sure I have something going on. ***I'M STILL A LONER,*** *so I always make sure my ass is covered."*

The differences between Perry and Tyler—long the source of the band's struggles—emerged as early as Aerosmith's first rehearsal together. "We had an argument over the volume of my amp," Perry recalls. "I was still trying to find my voice on guitar as much as the band was trying to find its sound. But I think the source of the argument was much deeper than my amp's volume level and had more to do with Steven's insecurities and perfectionism. He was convinced that the audience would hear every mistake. I think it's perfectly human to make a mistake, and I care more about the overall energy anyway. Jesus, I've seen so many bands fuck up, and they don't even flinch. I saw the Rolling Stones in Berlin a few weeks ago, and Keith fucked up the chords to the opening song, 'Start Me Up.' And that night was the best I had ever seen them play!"

Rocks covers Aerosmith's rapid rise and late-Seventies decline, kicked off by the literal "spilt-milk" incident, when Perry's famously volatile first wife, Elyssa, dumped a glass of milk onto bassist Tom Hamilton's wife, Terry. That incident led to Perry's departure from the band on July 28, 1979. For the next five years, he worked with his own band, the Joe Perry Project.

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JOE PERRY

"Leaving Aerosmith had a positive effect on my attitude," Perry reflects. "The split was exacerbated by the drugs and the partying. The band found Elyssa to be an easy scapegoat for blame when we should have been blaming ourselves. But it was a ridiculous time for me to leave. We were at the peak of our success, regularly playing to audiences of 60,000 fans. If we had half a brain we would have told our management to go fuck themselves and we would have taken a vacation."

Perry and guitarist Brad Whitford, who left the band in 1980, returned to Aerosmith in 1984. Although manager Tim Collins is credited with orchestrating the band's reunion, rehabilitation, and revival of success, the actual behind-the-scenes story is one of the book's most fascinating chapters, revealing an array of bizarre and intimidating tactics that were used to keep this astonishingly fragile unit together.

"Tim had a vision," Perry admits. "It was amazing that he could facilitate getting us back together, sober, and working again. His tactics worked well for the first couple of years, but after we grew up and he didn't deal with his own problems, he became a control freak. People in the business were going, 'Holy shit! This guy's a miracle worker,' but that was because he would only let certain things out to the rest of the world. During the process of getting the band clean again, he turned us into this sick, perverted cult. It was difficult to leave because the band was getting bigger and bigger and we didn't want to lose it all again."

"THE WAY THAT AEROSMITH WORKS IS VERY COMPLICATED, ***and it can get frustrating, because you have to dig down and look at things that you don't want to talk about."***

SEXY BEAST

Joe Perry talks about his Wandre/Davoli BB guitar

"I WALKED INTO JOHNNY DEPP'S HOUSE ONE DAY, and he had three guitars sitting there. He said, 'I went to this music store and saw these three noticeably different guitars. I've never seen anything like them before. You can have all three of them or take your pick.' They were Wandre guitars, and I'd never seen or heard of them either."

"So Johnny gave me this guitar. It was 2012, and later that year we were touring with Cheap Trick. Rick Nielsen is the top dog when it comes to guitars, but I figured I had him on this one. I said, 'I got this guitar,' and I started spelling out the name because I couldn't pronounce it. He said, 'Oh, a Wandre!' and he showed me a web site where I could look up more info about them. Rick also said that [*Cheap Trick bassist*] Tom Petersson had just got one. I was thinking, Jesus Christ! This guy knows everything!

"Apparently, they were made in the Sixties by Antonio Pioli in Italy. He lived near a U.S. Air Force base, and he would go to the dump and find old pieces of metal to take home to build guitars. He's like the Salvador Dali of guitar makers. This model has a *BB* motif inlaid on the fretboard, which stands for *Brigitte Bardot*, because of the sexy, curvaceous shape.

"I took the guitar on the road but couldn't use it. As soon as you turn it up, it starts to get that typical hollowbody feedback. It's more of a jazz guitar, but it will be a really good studio guitar. It has beautiful tone when you play it through a small studio amp."

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Over the past 30 years, the members of Aerosmith have become older, wiser, and less volatile, although tensions between Perry and Tyler still emerge occasionally. However, as the book reveals, Perry's life story has a happy ending, and he's become a contented husband, father, and musician—a striking contrast to the temperamental, drug-saturated wreck who walked away from the band in 1979. While the Aerosmith story is still far from over, after reading *Rocks* one has to wonder how the band ever managed to work in the first place, let alone survive for the past three decades since the reunion.

"I always make sure I have something going on," Perry says when asked about it. "When the autobiography comes out, I will be promoting that. There's also talk about doing more Aerosmith tours in the future, although Steven will only do two shows a week to protect his voice. That could give me an opportunity to work with the Project, form a supergroup, or collaborate with someone else. Who knows? I'm still a loner, so I always make sure my ass is covered." GA

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JOE PERRY

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ROUND *and* ROUND

by JOE PERRY

IN THIS EXCERPT FROM *ROCKS*, JOE PERRY TELLS THE EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF A BELOVED LOST LES PAUL THAT PASSED THROUGH VARIOUS NOTABLE GUITARISTS' HANDS.

IN SEPTEMBER 2000, [*Perry's wife*] Billie threw me the party of parties for my 50th birthday. She put it together at Mount Blue, a restaurant in Marshfield, Massachusetts. With the help of my first lieutenant, John Bionelli, Billie was able to recruit one of my favorite bands, Cheap Trick. I'd always wanted to play a full set with them and began woodshedding. As a bonus birthday gift, they let me pick out my favorite songs. Come the night of the party, I was ready.

Billie went all out. Outside the restaurant there was a small circus for the kids and a big rock-climbing wall. Inside was Laurie Cabot, the famous Salem witch, telling fortunes, as well as a palm reader and an astrologer. Elvis and Marilyn Monroe impersonators walked around while a master barbecue chef served a huge smoked pig, apple and all. Family and friends came from everywhere—including musicians from my early bands and the Joe Perry Project.

I figured that the highlight of the evening would be my set with Cheap Trick. But at its conclusion there was something even better, a presentation that blew my mind. Here's the backstory. Back in 1980 when I needed money, I did something I came to regret: I sold my 1959 Gibson Les Paul Standard, one of my most cherished guitars. The 1959 Les Paul is to guitars what the 1957 Chevy is to cars—a classic of classics. In 1959, Gibson made only two in a color they called tobacco-burst. Mine happened to be one of those two. Despite their reputation, not all '59s sound great, but this one was a true gem. I hated parting with it.

A few years later when the band got back together, I got a call from Eric Johnson. He said he had bought this legendary Gibson and when he learned it had been mine, it hadn't set easy with him. He realized the sacredness of the instrument and was willing to sell it back to me. Given the value of the guitar, the price he was asking—eight thousand dollars—was not unreasonable, but because I was still struggling financially, I had to pass. That killed me all over again.

As the years went by, I lost track of the guitar. But with the rebirth of Aerosmith in the late Eighties, I found myself with more than enough dough to buy it back—if only I could find it. Eric Johnson had sold it long before and lost track of the instrument. Brad Whitford, whose passion for guitars is as great as mine, knew the story of my lost '59 Gibson as well as anyone. So when he happened to see a photo spread in *Guitar Player* magazine with Slash in front of all his guitars, he immediately spotted mine. He brought me the picture.

"That's your '59 Gibson, isn't it?" Brad asked. "Sure as hell is," I said. By then Slash had become a friend, so I called him.

"I'd been hoping you'd never call," he said when I asked about the guitar. Naturally he knew it was mine. "When it came up for sale, that's what made it so special. That's why I had to have it."

"I appreciate that, brother," I said, "so you can understand why I want it back so badly."

"I was hoping you wouldn't ask, Joe."

"I have to. It's not about the money. You can name the price."

"It's never been about the money," said Slash. "Just like the *Mona Lisa* isn't about the money. It's priceless."

"So you'll sell it back to me?"

"I gotta think about it, Joe. Give me time."

I couldn't argue. But in the course of time, Slash and I lost touch. He was out doing his thing while I was out doing mine. I tried to reach him a couple of times but didn't hear back.

The next time I saw him was in 1992 at a huge venue outside Paris. Guns N' Roses asked Steven, me, Lenny Kravitz, and Jeff Beck to perform with them as special guests. They sent us tickets to fly over on the Concorde.

This was Slash's heavy-drinking period. Both before and after the concert I tried to talk to him, but it wasn't easy. Finally I sat him down and said, "Look, man, this '59 Gibson is fucking up our friendship. I'm not going to ask you about it anymore. If you decide to sell it to me, fine. If not, that's okay."

"Just give me some more time, Joe."

"Take all the time you need."

I forgot about it, but other guitarists didn't. The story of my '59 Les Paul took on a life of its own. I heard that Jimmy Page had given Slash a hard time about selling it back to its rightful owner. Other guitarists weighed in as well. But I considered it a lost cause. I understood how Slash felt. It was a beauty, it was history, and it felt so fuckin' good to hold and play.

So you can imagine my surprise when in the middle of the set with Cheap Trick, my guitar tech walked up to me and handed me my sacred Les Paul '59 tobacco-burst Gibson. With no price tag attached, with nothing but love and respect, Slash was giving it back—an amazing end to the most amazing birthday party I'd ever had.

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Historic photos from Taylor Guitars' archives; (center) Bob Taylor (left) and Kurt Listug today

RUNNING DOWN A Dream

CELEBRATING ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY, **TAYLOR GUITARS** *LOOKS BACK AT THE STRUGGLES, TRIUMPHS, AND ENDURING VISION THAT MADE THE COMPANY A GREAT AMERICAN SUCCESS STORY.*

BY CHRIS GILL

For its 40th anniversary, Taylor upgraded its 800 Series. Shown here are the 814ce and 816ce.

RUNNING DOWN A Dream

Many acoustic guitarists have never heard of Lemon Grove, California, but for devoted enthusiasts, this city, located less than 10 miles east of San Diego, is as important to the history of the acoustic guitar as Kalamazoo, Michigan, or Nazareth, Pennsylvania. During the late Sixties and early Seventies, Sam Radding operated a retail store and workshop called American Dream in Lemon Grove, where many familiar names in the stringed-instrument world once plied their craft, including James Goodall, Geoff Stelling, and Greg Deering (the latter two went on to train Larry and Kim Breedlove at the Deering Banjo Company). But the most familiar name to come from the American Dream shop is that of Bob Taylor, who, along with his co-worker Kurt Listug, formed the most successful acoustic guitar company to come along since Gibson and Martin.

"WENDY MELVOIN PLAYED PRINCE'S PURPLE TAYLOR IN THE 'RASPBERRY BERET' VIDEO, WHICH HELPED US GET ATTENTION."

Bob Taylor was already an experienced guitar builder when he started working at American Dream at the age of 18 in 1973. "I came from a family that built things," Taylor says. "In junior high and high school, I won awards at state expositions and industrial-arts fairs for projects that I built out of metal and wood. I was learning to play guitar and I wanted one, so I decided to build my own guitar. I found Irving Sloane's book *Classic Guitar Construction* and read it. When I started building guitars, I had never seen nor even heard of a Martin. I heard of Gibson, but I had never seen a Gibson acoustic guitar either."

As Taylor started building his own guitar, he purchased supplies like fret wire and tuners from American Dream. Taylor built several guitars during his high school years that impressed Radding enough to hire Taylor after Bob graduated. "I learned to build guitars the way that Sam Radding built them," Taylor says. "He taught me his unique way of attaching the neck to the body that wasn't a bolt-on, dovetail, or T-shaped mortise and tenon."

Taylor started working at American Dream about a month after Kurt Listug came onboard. "A friend of mine from college worked at American Dream," Listug says. "I thought it would be cool to work on guitars, so I pestered my friend and Sam for about a year before I got a job there. Actually, it wasn't a job—it was more of a co-op where you could do work and you'd get paid after someone paid for your work."

About a year after Listug and Taylor started at American Dream, Radding decided to sell it. Listug, Taylor, and Steve Schemmer borrowed $10,000 from their families to purchase it. "We took over the shop on October 15, 1974," Listug recalls. "About $3,700 went to paying bills, buying equipment, and paying off Sam. The remaining $6,300 was our working capital, which we ended up spending pretty quickly. That forced us to figure out how to make the business work."

Initially the new company was called the Westland Music Company, but that name was too big to fit onto a guitar's headstock. Instead, the name Taylor was chosen, since Bob was the main guitar builder and designer, and the names Listug and Schemmer sounded too foreign for an American company. Taylor produced about 150 guitars in its first two years, selling the instruments directly to customers from its shop in Lemon Grove.

In 1976, Taylor started selling guitars to dealers, which set the stage for the company's growth but also set its progress back, as profit margins for each instrument were now cut by more than half. With no travel budget, Listug drove a few hours north, to Los Angeles, where he convinced retailers like McCabe's Guitar Shop and Westwood Music to become Taylor dealers. A distribution company owned by Paul Rothchild, a former record producer best known for his work on the first five albums by the Doors, sold Taylor guitars between 1977 and 1979, expanding its dealer network across the United States.

"We ended up making more guitars," Listug says, "but at the same time we were making less money because the distributor needed to get a cut as well. Our bills began to pile up, so we fired Rothchild and I started traveling across the country to sell guitars to dealers. We started to limit our weekly production to the amount of guitars that we could sell in a week, so we could stabilize our cash flow. It took us until 1986 to have a stable enough cash flow to pay ourselves $300 per week."

In some respects, the early to mid Eighties was the worst time to operate a fledgling acoustic guitar company, but—to steal a line from Dickens—it was also the best time. "The Eighties was the worst acoustic guitar market in 100 years," Taylor says. "Even the biggest companies were down to making only 36 guitars a week. We were making 15 to 20 guitars a week, so a company that had once been about 100 times bigger than us was suddenly only about twice as big as us. But whereas other companies were failing, things weren't all that different for us. It became a great opportunity."

During the mid Eighties, Taylor developed a cult following primarily for its 12-string guitars. Guitarists, particularly those who mostly played electric, started to notice the necks' slim, comfortable profile, and news of Taylor guitars' excellent playability spread by word of mouth. The introduction of the Artist Series guitars also helped the company gain attention.

"The Artist Series guitars were finished in different colors and had flames," Taylor says. "They were very attractive, eye-catching guitars. We had started doing really beautiful, artistic woodwork then. Wendy Melvoin played Prince's purple Taylor Artist Series in the 'Raspberry Beret' video in 1985, which really helped us get attention. The Artist Series guitar looked great onstage and had a neck that was very comfortable to play. It was also one of the few

A Taylor Koi Living Jewel guitar, one of 100 made; (right) Bob Taylor at the company's new facility in El Cajon

acoustic guitars you could buy at the time that had a pickup installed. We noticed a big change in our sales after that."

In 1987, Taylor moved from the original American Dream workshop location to a bigger shop in Santee. The following year was the first that the company achieved sales of a million dollars. "Because we stuck it out and never gave up, we were ready when acoustic guitars finally made their comeback," Taylor explains. "When Clapton and the whole MTV Unplugged thing happened, we were there. People knew that we made high-quality guitars, and by then we were no longer a newcomer."

With the trials and tribulations of the company's turbulent first 12 years long behind it, Taylor decided to make a bold statement with its first limited-edition Anniversary Model guitar, introduced in 1994 to celebrate the company's first 20 years. That model introduced Taylor's Grand Auditorium body shape, which went on to become the company's most popular body style and is a feature of its all-time best-selling model, the 814ce. Thanks to the success of the 20th Anniversary Model, Taylor's subsequent Anniversary Model guitars became the company's avenue for introducing new features. For example, the 25th Anniversary Model introduced the company's revolutionary NT neck, which made it incredibly easy for repair specialists and even players to properly set the neck.

Notable milestones for the company in the new millennium include the introduction of the popular Baby Taylor model in 2000, the innovative electric/acoustic hollowbody T5 model in 2005, and a line of high-end boutique guitars produced by a new division of the company called R. Taylor in 2007. But while the company has offered many excellent instruments that have become modern classics, Taylor's contributions to the process of guitar manufacturing are perhaps more significant and enduring. In 2002, the company moved its factory to a new state-of-the-art facility in nearby El Cajon, where it established new industry standards that many other companies have adopted since.

"WE EXPLOIT TECHNOLOGY TO MAKE GUITARS BETTER. WE DON'T USE TECHNOLOGY TO MAKE GUITARS FASTER."

"Our factory is super-green and compliant," Taylor says. "More of the finish makes it from the spray gun to the guitar, which means that less of the finish goes into the atmosphere. There's a sustainable, environmental aspect to all that we do. The factory is also designed to be worker friendly. Each work bench is fully adjustable, and we have a chiropractor on staff."

From its early adoption of CNC machines to the development of ultraviolet finish curing, Taylor has never shied from using technology. "We exploit technology to make guitars better," Taylor says. "We don't use technology to make guitars faster. We recently hired master luthier Andy Powers, who helped us come up with numerous innovations found on our newly redesigned 800 Series, which we did instead of making a 40th anniversary model."

Listug is equally excited about the addition of Powers to Taylor. "Andy adds a new dimension to the company," he says. "We keep pushing the boundaries and getting better. I think that our golden era is still ahead of us. Taylor's future looks very bright." GA

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WINTER'S TALE

REMEMBERING *JOHNNY WINTER*, MASTER OF THE BLUES AND A FIREBIRD FIREBRAND.

BY ALAN DI PERNA

PAUL ROBERTS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

THERE WAS NO SHORTAGE of hot, young blues guitarists in 1969, when Johnny Winter first hit the scene. Eric Clapton, Mike Bloomfield, Peter Green, Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page, and Jeff Beck had all proven their 12-bar mettle, making blues very much the focal point of the burgeoning counterculture rock scene and drawing much deserved attention to traditional bluesmen like Buddy Guy, B.B. King, Albert King, Freddie King, and Muddy Waters.

But even in this distinguished company, Johnny Winter stood out by a mile. In an era obsessed with the question of whether white men could play the blues, Winter was whiter than white, an albino with snow-white hair, pale skin, and the congenital near blindness that is a byproduct of albinism. And he certainly could play the blues. His 1969 self-titled Columbia Records debut was a revelation. His playing was deeply authentic, yet utterly unique. He was equally adept at blinding single-note leads, scarifying electric slide playing, and profoundly rootsy acoustic slide.

"Johnny Winter was one of my first three guitar heroes, along with Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix," says Warren Haynes, who played on Winter's 2011 album, *Roots*. "He was so connected to the blues, but he also took it into the future with an intensity no one prior had brought to the music. I always loved that he constantly pushed himself. You got the feeling he was hanging on for dear life."

Born John Dawson Winter III in Beaumont, Texas, on February 23, 1944, he belongs to the proud Lone Star State blues tradition that stretches from Blind Lemon Jefferson and Lightnin' Hopkins to Billy Gibbons and Stevie Ray Vaughan. But at the same time, his work transcends that tradition. Paul Nelson, Winter's rhythm guitarist and manager from 2004 until the end of his life, enjoyed a privileged insight into the guitarist's encyclopedic take on the blues guitar idiom.

"Johnny told me he first learned slide from listening to Elmore James," Nelson says. "Then he went on to Robert Johnson, Son House, and Robert Nighthawk. His favorite B.B. King album was *Singing' the Blues*. He liked B.B. when B.B. played a Strat, because B.B. played more like T-Bone Walker then. And Johnny really loved Clarence Garlow, because Garlow was like T-Bone with an edge. Chuck Berry was another biggie for Johnny. All his double-stops and lead-in lines were pure Chuck Berry."

Winter started out playing rock and roll, making his first recording at 15 as a member of Johnny and the Jammers, a group that also featured his brother and frequent musical collaborator, Edgar. He moved to a pure blues format in the late Sixties, cutting an album, *The Progressive Blues Experiment*, for a small Austin label, Sonobeat, in 1968. It was reissued to wide acclaim once the *Johnny Winter* album exploded in 1969.

The stunning electric guitar work on that breakthrough disc becomes all the more amazing when you realize that it was played on a humble Fender Mustang. Performing at Woodstock later that year, an appearance that helped cement his superstar status, Winter wielded a Fender Electric XII 12-string strung with six strings. In 1970 Winter discovered what would become his main ax for many years: a 1963 Gibson Firebird V that he purchased in St. Louis.

"I was initially attracted to the Firebird because I liked the way it looked," Winter told *Guitar Aficionado* editorial director Brad Tolinski earlier this year. "When I played it, I discovered I liked the way it sounded too. The Firebird is the best of all worlds. It feels like a Gibson, but it sounds closer to a Fender than most other Gibsons. I was never a big fan of humbucking pickups, but the mini humbuckers on the Firebird have more bite and treble."

In his work with Winter, Paul Nelson had ample opportunity to hear the legendary Firebird in action. "It had the tone of a Stradivarius," he says. "The wood had aged so beautifully. When you'd knock on it, it would ring. It weighed like it was made out of balsa wood."

Nelson also feels that Gibson string spacing was more conducive to Winter's picking style than Fender spacing. Early in his music education, while exploring the work of Chet Atkins and Merle Travis with a guitar teacher, Winter had acquired the lifelong habit of playing with a thumb pick. "That's why he had that high speed," Nelson says. "When he would really start picking notes, he would make a fist on the thumb pick and then the thumb pick would rest far down the thumb. It was very rigid and precise, which enabled him to be very articulate in hitting notes."

While Winter owned several Firebirds, his 1963 example was his favorite. "He said the pickups were a little too bassy on the other ones," Nelson explains. "The '63 was his go-to guitar." The neck of this hard-traveling ax suffered a few cracks over the years and became bowed, which Winter found ideal for playing slide guitar. He generally tuned his guitars down a whole step, and his slide of choice was cut from the outer shaft of a hi-hat stand.

Winter with his Firebird onstage in the U.K. in 1974; (opening page) with his Erlewine Lazer in New York City on September 19, 1985

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

The Firebird arrived right around the time that Winter changed his musical direction from blues to straight-ahead rock. In 1970, on the advice of Steve Paul, his manager at the time, he teamed up with guitarist Rick Derringer and his band, the McCoys, to record *Johnny Winter And* as well as a 1971 concert sequel, *Live Johnny Winter And*. This venture would produce some of Winter's biggest hits, including "Rock and Roll Hoochie Koo" and "Still Alive and Well," both of which were written by Derringer.

But Winter was unhappy playing rock and roll. *Johnny Winter And* was his most successful album, but it was his least favorite, he often said. Winter's dislike for his new musical style may have been a factor in his growing heroin addiction in the early Seventies. Drug and alcohol dependency would become a major issue in his life and seriously undermine his health over the years.

He would soon find his way back to the blues, however. In 1977, Winter produced and played guitar on Muddy Waters' "comeback" album, *Hard Again*. He went on to produce three more albums for Waters—1978's *I'm Ready*, the 1979 live disc *Muddy "Mississippi" Waters*, and 1981's *King Bee*—and recruited Waters' backing band for his own triumphant return to the blues, 1977's *Nothin' but the Blues*.

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"AT THOSE GIGS IN THE LAST MONTHS, HE WAS ON FIRE. HE FINISHED ON A *HIGH NOTE*."

—PAUL NELSON

In the Eighties, Winter recorded a string of stellar albums for the blues specialty label Alligator Records. During this period he began playing Lazer guitars, designed by luthier Mark Erlewine. He would eventually own six of the distinctive, small-bodied, headless guitars.

"When I first bought one, I thought I was just going to use it as a travel guitar," Winter told Tolinski. "But the first day I plugged it in, it sounded so good that I wanted to use it for a gig that night."

In 1984, Erlewine brought one of the first Lazers to Winter at a show in Texas. This black guitar with a single humbucking pickup was a stock instrument built at the Samick factory in South Korea under a licensing agreement with IMC.

"Johnny started using that guitar right away," Erlewine says. "It's on the cover of his [*1984*] *Guitar Slinger* album. He liked the Lazer because it was so light. In 1985, he ordered a red Samick-built, single-humbucker Lazer. And I built him his first custom Lazer in 1989—the white one that he put a lot of decals on. It had a single-coil in the neck and a humbucker by the bridge. By the early Nineties, I started making Johnny Winter signature model Lazers. People saw him playing that white one and they wanted one like it."

As the Nineties got underway, Winter's substance abuse issues had begun to compromise his health and his music. A fall down a staircase left him unable to stand throughout an entire set, so he began to perform sitting down in the tradition of elder bluesmen like John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters. It wasn't until Nelson came onboard as Winter's manager in 2004 that the guitarist's health began to turn around. Nelson slowly weaned him off methadone, on which he'd been dependent for decades. He also put Winter on an exercise regimen and arranged for him to have eye surgery to better his vision. "His playing improved the minute he got off the crap," Nelson says.

In the final decade of Winter's life, another electric guitar—a Dean Z—entered the picture. "He loved it because it was so wafer thin," Nelson says. "It's only about as thick as a Mac laptop. So it was easy for him to carry when he walked to his chair onstage and sat and played like Muddy."

Winter was in the midst of a substantial resurgence over the past few years. The 2011 album *Roots* featured "Winterized" versions of some of the guitarist's favorite classic blues and early rock and roll tunes. Vince Gill, Derek Trucks, and Susan Tedeschi, along with Haynes, were among the guest guitarists who paid tribute to Winter on the album.

The momentum continued with a 2014 career retrospective box set, *True to the Blues: The Johnny Winter Story*, and the filming of a soon-to be-released documentary *Johnny Winter: Down & Dirty*. Winter also completed what has become his final album, *Step Back*. Like *Roots*, it is a collection of blues and early rock and roll stompers that Winter attacks with panache and a masterful command of his instrument. This time out, guest performers included Eric Clapton, Billy Gibbons, Joe Perry, Leslie West, Joe Bonamassa, Ben Harper, Brian Setzer, and Dr. John.

But what was meant to be a career resurgence became a glorious swansong. Johnny Winter was found dead in a hotel room near Zurich, Switzerland on July 16 of this year, two days after the final date of a European tour.

"At those gigs in the last months, he was on fire," Nelson says. "He was aware of it and he was loving it. He was healthy. He finished on a high note." GA

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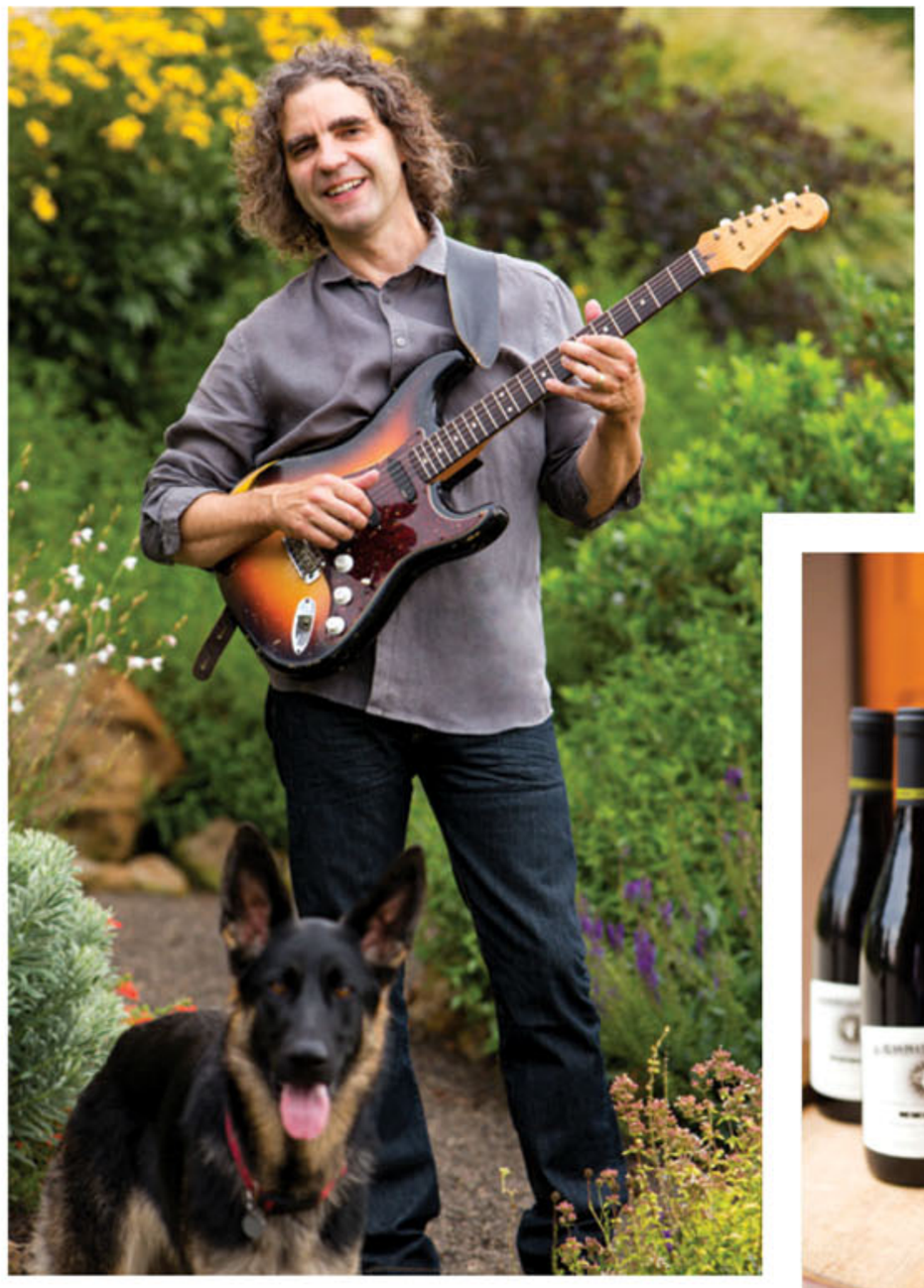
Old Soul

Whether making wine or making music, **Jay Somers** prefers the traditional approach.

By Chris Gill

Photography by Ty Milford



(clockwise from left) Somers with his Fender Custom Shop '61 Strat; J. Christopher vineyard; bottles of J. Christopher 2011 Dundee Hills Pinot Noir

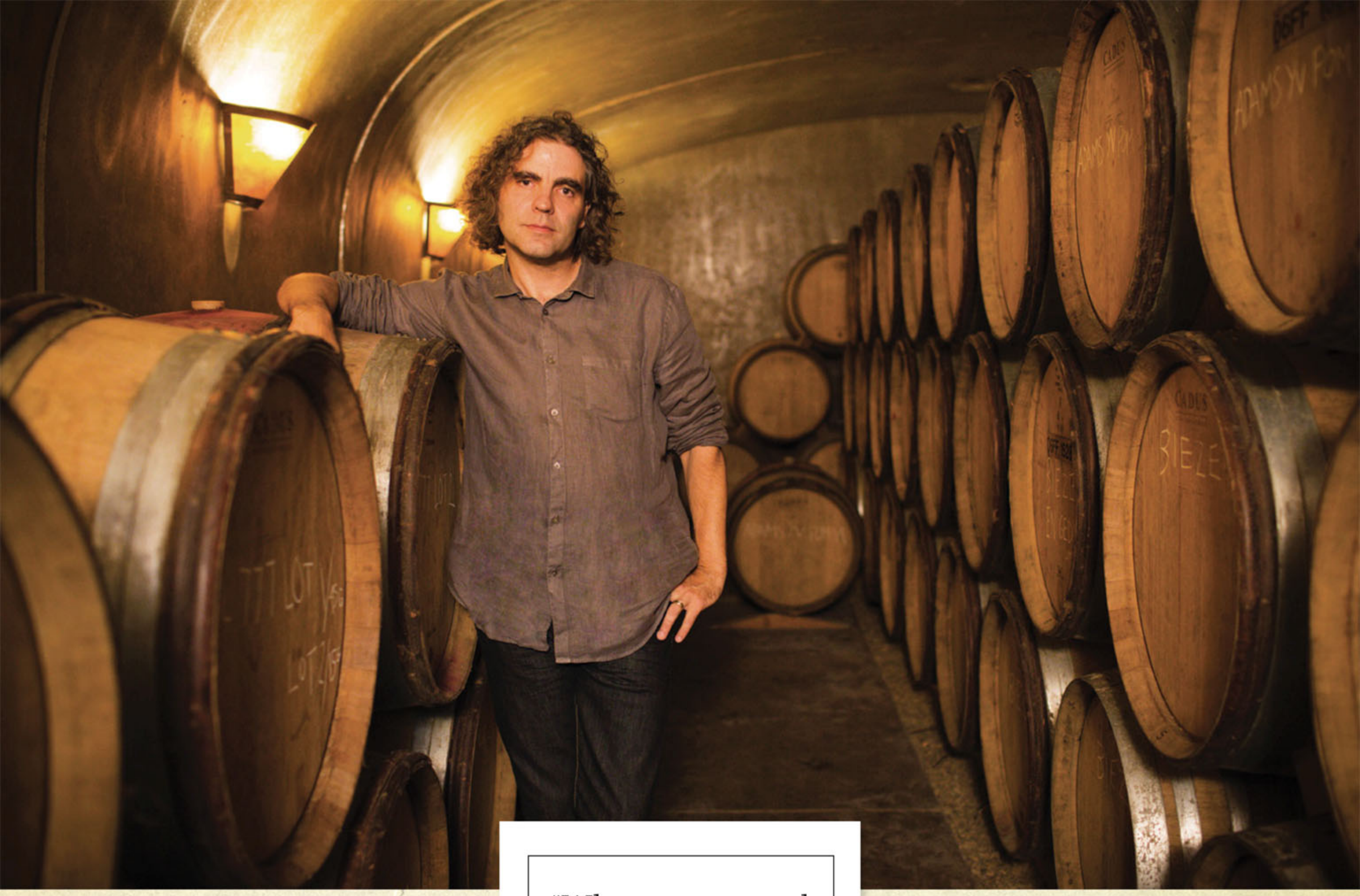
Perhaps it's a coincidence that Jay Somers was born in 1965, the same year that David Lett planted the first Pinot Noir vineyards in Oregon's Willamette Valley. But considering that one of Somers' first favorite songs was Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Heard It Through the Grapevine," some might say that it was actually destiny that led him to become one of the region's most talented winemakers.

Somers' winery, J. Christopher Wines, located on Chehalem Mountain in the northern Willamette Valley, handcrafts a variety of acclaimed Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc wines in small lots using biodynamic practices and grapes sourced from Willamette's best vineyards in addition to his own vineyards. Inspired by the traditional styles of Burgundy and Sancerre, Somers offers wines that exude old-world charm, balance, and finesse that is uncommon in an era when most up-and-coming American winemakers favor science over art.

While many of the most recent generation of winemakers learned their craft studying viticulture and enology at schools like UC Davis, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, or Cornell University, Somers became a winemaker in a more traditional, self-directed fashion by pursuing his personal passion for "fermenting things." "I was fascinated with wine ever since I was a kid," he says. "My mother and stepfather would go on trips to Napa and come back with all of these fascinating bottles of wine. They let me try the wine occasionally, and I became really interested in it."

Somers' first foray into fermentation was beer he brewed at home while attending the University of Oregon in Eugene, where he majored in philosophy and minored in music. When he graduated in the mid Eighties, the job market for philosophy majors wasn't particularly robust, so he put his beer-making talents to work as a master brewer at McMenamins Brewery in Eugene.

"I was always more interested in wine than beer," Somers admits, "but back then there weren't many wineries in the Willamette Valley, and getting a job at the few wineries that existed was nearly impossible. While I was working for McMenamins, I opened up their largest brewery at this



place called Edgefield. They put a winery in there about a year before we put in the brewery. That was my first exposure to how wine was made."

Eventually, Somers began making his own wine, sourcing Pinot Noir grapes from vineyards near Portland. "Burgundy wines changed my life," he says. "I took a tasting class with Matt Kramer, who had just written his book *Making Sense of Burgundy*. Before then I really liked heavy, new world–style wines made in Napa. But after tasting all those great Burgundies, I became very interested in Pinot Noir. I was lucky that I lived in Portland, only 25 minutes away from vineyards that were producing great Pinot Noir grapes."

Somers made his official entry into the winemaking business after a chance meeting with the winemaker at Adelsheim during a 1992 tasting event. Adelsheim needed a harvest person, so the winemaker offered him a job. After two years at Adelsheim, Somers went to work for John Paul at Cameron Winery.

"At Cameron, I worked in both the vineyard and in the winery," he recalls. "In the modern wine world, there's usually a huge division between the vineyard and winery. One person manages the vineyard, while another person makes the wine. In Europe, most of the smaller producers spend most of their time in the vineyard; then they come in when they have time to work on the wines. That's why I love the term *wine grower*. It's a European term, whereas here people tend to be called *winemakers*. I feel that the vineyard is where the wine is actually made, and it's important to become intimate with the vineyard."

> "When you spend **60 to 70 hours a week working in the winery** like I do, you need another creative outlet."

In 1996, Somers asked Paul if he could make some wine. Paul allowed him to make five barrels, and Somers sourced Pinot Noir grapes from Charlie's Vineyard, which was adjacent to Cameron. "I still work with that vineyard today," Somers says. "In fact, I'm the only person who has ever made wines from that vineyard. Over the next three years, I made about 120 cases of wine, and then, in 1999, I went to work for another person briefly before going into business by myself. Basically, I started J. Christopher in 1996 with $3,000 and three tons of Pinot Noir. I put a lot of hard work into it and followed the American dream."

By 2009, J. Christopher's annual production had grown to 6,000 cases. That was the same year that he officially formed a partnership with Ernst Loosen, a German producer known for the world-class Dr. Loosen Rieslings. Somers had previously met Loosen at a party and discovered

(from left) Somers' 1959 VOS Les Paul Standard reissue, 1938 Gibson L-7, 1948 Gibson ES-125, and 1959 VOS ES-330 reissue

that he was familiar with J. Christopher wines, having bought several cases for personal consumption since the Nineties. A big fan of Pinot Noir wines produced in the Willamette Valley, Loosen was looking for a local Pinot Noir project to invest in, and in 2009 he helped Somers purchase 40 acres of property on Chehalem Mountain and build a state-of-the-art Pinot Noir production facility there.

"Our mission is to make old-world wines with new-world terroir," Somers says. "We use long barrel aging, natural fermentation, and very little intervention. We're not trying to manipulate the wine and turn it into something that is always big and fruit forward. J. Christopher wines are very classically styled."

Somers exhibits a similar dedication to music, which is as important to his daily life as his devotion to making wine. In fact, his business card lists his occupations as both winemaker and lead guitarist. The J. Christopher web site home page announces "gigs and news," and he even offers a wine called Nuages, named after the Django Reinhardt standard. When he's not in the vineyards or winery, Somers can often be found playing with his band Vin Halen or recording music for his Portland Cement project.

"I'm always chasing this sound. That's why I have so many amps and guitars. It's like chasing the perfect wine."

"When you spend 60 to 70 hours a week working in the winery like I do, you need another creative outlet," he explains. "Playing guitar takes my mind off of the weather and the vineyard. The bands are a great outlet for me. Some people get up in the morning and do yoga, but I'll grab my kitchen guitar"—a black Fender Custom Shop '69 Strat with a rosewood fretboard—"off the wall while I'm making coffee and play for an hour before I talk to anybody."

Vin Halen is a group that Somers recently formed with other winemakers. His assistant winemaker, Tim Malone, plays bass, and the drummer is Tyson Crowley of Crowley Wines. "It's the perfect band to be in," he says. "People who are not in the wine industry do not understand that we disappear for six weeks starting in October through November. That's when I live at the winery 24/7. We play soul jazz, things like Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, and Kenny Burrell. We'll also play some Stevie Wonder songs and some original jazz-blues stuff I've written."

Portland Cement consists of Somers and Roy Hinshaw, who played bass in bands with Somers during their college years. Keyboard player Charlie Dennard, who is the musical director for the Cirque du Soleil production *Totem*, joined the duo for several tracks on its eponymous debut album. The

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Somers' Maurice DuPont MD-50 (left) and National resonator

music is reminiscent of the modern jazz-rock styles of Jeff Beck, Robben Ford, and David Torn, but with Somers' own distinctive voice.

Although Somers has played guitar since he was 15, he started collecting guitars only recently. "My first guitar was a black Stratocaster with a maple fretboard," he says. "I did road construction an entire summer to buy it. Sadly, it was stolen from my house in 2003. I bought the kitchen guitar immediately after that, which was the start of my collecting habit. In a way I've been chasing that old guitar. If I ever see it again, I'd pay a billion dollars for it."

Other notable guitars in Somers' collection include a Rick Kelly custom Tele-style, a Fender Custom Shop '61 Strat built by John Cruz, a 1991 Fender Yngwie Malmsteen Strat, a Maurice DuPont MD-50, a reissue Gibson 1959 VOS ES-330, a reissue 1959 VOS Les Paul Standard, a 1948 Gibson ES-125, and a 1938 Gibson L-7. "The L-7 has picture-frame inlays and is just gorgeous," he says. "I've been tempted to trade it in to get an ES-175, but my wife loves it and won't let me get rid of it.

"When I travel, I like to go to guitar shops and buy something," he continues. "I bought the Rick Kelly guitar when I was sent to New York. It's made of 100-year-old butternut wood that he salvaged from some old building in Manhattan's Bowery. When I was in Nashville, I bought the ES-125 from Gruhn's. On that same trip, I toured the Gibson Custom Shop, and the guy who led the tour kept handing me Les Pauls. I'm not really a Les Paul guy, but I thought they were amazing. I ended up buying the VOS Standard from Rudy's Music in New York."

Recently, Somers has started collecting amps as well. For years, his main amp was a Mesa/Boogie Mark IV, but currently he prefers to play through smaller amps, like his Seventies Fender Princeton and Deluxe Reverb amps, Fuchs ODS-30 head, and Bluetron Bluedrive. The day after the interview, he was anticipating the arrival of a Lazy J 20.

"I'm always chasing this sound in my head," Somers explains. "That's why I have so many amps and guitars. It's like chasing the perfect wine. It will never happen, but as long as you're trying, it's worth doing. The moment you think you gotten there, you should just quit. It's all about the creative process." GA

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Series Finale

WHEN REVIVING A DEAD DANELECTRO, IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THE WIRING.

{ *BY FLIP SCIPIO* }

THE 1960 white Danelectro Deluxe Model 6036S shown here came to me a number of years ago with its innards hanging out, having been partially disemboweled by a local musician armed with a Kool-Aid–and-Everclear cocktail and a looming studio bill due in two days. The man's frustration with the broken wiring wasn't a surprise to me. Danelectro's preferred pickups-in-series wiring scheme avoided using a wire to electrically ground the guitar through the player's body and achieved its heralded hum-free behavior by using totally shielded circuitry. This included everything from the brass lipstick-tube pickup covers to the metal-braid-covered wires that led to a copper-foiled cardboard box that covered the controls and completed the grounding rail. The copper box was held together with masking tape, and any break in the ground line would leave the guitar buzzing or remarkably silent due to the nature of series wiring.

While both Fender and Gibson traditionally wired their pickups in parallel, Danelectro's preference for series wiring was one of several interesting features that set the company's guitars apart from its competitors. As much as this practical design allowed for a budget-priced instrument with great sound and a cheeky sense of humor, the wiring details tended to make any home improvements almost immediately fatal. (I once pulled a Danelectro-made Silvertone guitar out of a dumpster. It was in fine shape, discounting a few missing strings and a fragrant bouquet of cold-soldered wire ends that indicated a late-night act of pure desperation, illustrated by the words "I Need a Brake!" scratched into the red-painted Masonite.)

This 1960 Danelectro has the single-script Kluson DeLuxe tuners and the typical rosewood fingerboard whose Brazilian heritage is often obscured by the rough power-planer marks that give these fingerboards their wavy appearance. When Danelectro introduced the Model 6036S in 1959, it also offered the similar Model 6037S, featuring a mother-of-wood-grain body finish called Dark Walnut, and the Model 6038S, with a finish called Honey Walnut. Both models sported a white pickguard.

The 6036S came standard with a four-knob array featuring three stacked controls, each with a pinball flipper–like appendage for manipulating the top potentiometer. These twin pots had markedly different resistance values, and the top pot had a nail driven through its side, which somehow turned the variable resistor into an on/off switch for a "limited-range" function, leaving the bottom control as a regular pickup volume. The fourth control had a single pot and functioned as a master volume.

When I got the guitar, the remains of the wiring harness were so far gone that it made me consider an alternative tactic to use the three lipstick pickups to their full resonant effect. Since there were four holes in the top already, I chose to rewire the guitar somewhat closer to a Gibson ES-5, with three individual volume controls and a master tone control. I had seen a picture of T-Bone Walker playing a new 1949 ES-5 guitar on a compilation LP of his excellent Forties recordings, and I couldn't resist having a budget ES-5 at my disposal. And so the Danelectro's three pickups were rewired in series and in phase through single 500k pots, with a pull switch on one of the pots to put the bridge pickup out of phase with either the neck or the middle pickup. This made it possible for the guitar to mimic the often snarky sound associated with parts of T-Bone's masterful playing. The brown radio knobs I found at a Maine flea market seemed to fit the guitar quite well, since the missing original knobs were also dark brown.

I'd be the last person to suggest everybody start rewiring nice old guitars for fun without considering the value and provenance of these instruments. I find delight in guitars for the strange things that they can do through their eccentric designs, and it's a sin to see what's become of many cool offbeat guitars that were badly converted to something they were never intended to be. But I do dig my converted white three-pickup guitar, somehow the espresso of all things Danelectro. GA

For an out-of-phase experience, ***Flip Scipio*** *suggests listening to Los Lobos'* Colossal Head *album. Thanks to Steve Soest and Mike Koontz.*

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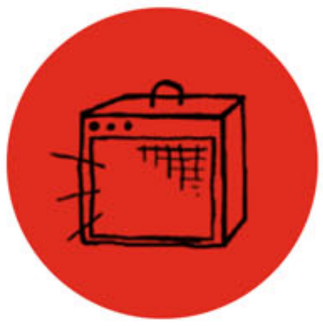

The Sound of Rock

MARSHALL PART 1: THE HAND-WIRED AMPS

{ *BY MITCH COLBY* }

SHORTLY AFTER its inception in the early Sixties, Marshall became the icon of backline amplification. Starting with the early Marshall amps inspired by the Fender 5F6-A Bassman, Jim Marshall had his designers make amps for guitarists who wanted a competitive edge. Marshall amps had to have two things: *the* sound and a commanding stage presence. Marshall dominated stages from the late Sixties through the Nineties, and while guitarists today have more amp brands to choose from than ever before, Marshall is still the go-to amp for rehearsal spaces, backline companies, and bands on tour.

Some of the best-sounding and most collectible Marshalls are the Plexis (so called for their clear acrylic front and back panels), built from circa 1962 through 1969, and the metal-panel amps made through mid 1973, when Marshall switched from hand-wired to printed circuit boards. Although the PCB-based amps often feature many of the exact same parts, some say the hand-wired amps sound better, and they are easier to repair. The printed circuit boards originally used light-duty traces, so working on them can be dicey.

The most desirable early Marshall models include the JTM45, JTM50, JMP50, and Super Lead 100 (Model 1959) as well as the 10-, 18-, and 20-watt combos and JTM45-based combos (subsequently dubbed Bluesbreaker because Eric Clapton used one on the Bluesbreakers' "Beano" album). The JTM45 was the first Marshall head. It originally featured KT66 power amp tubes that delivered about 30 watts of clean power, and the model quickly morphed into more aggressive and powerful 50-watt amps driven by EL34s. Marshall then developed 100-watt amps for guitarists who were playing large venues and in bands with increasingly

louder stage levels during the era before amps were miked through the main P.A. system. Early Marshall amps have warmer tone and a softer feel. By the late Sixties and early Seventies, the sound became tighter and brighter due to more filtering and changes to the signal path.

While bands of the British Invasion mainly used Vox amps, the more raucous British rock bands of the late Sixties played through Marshalls. Jimi Hendrix discovered Marshall amps after he moved to the U.K. in the mid Sixties. When those acts hit the U.S., stateside bands started using Marshall as well. I'll never forget seeing Marshall stacks for the first time when I saw Cream perform in 1968.

The early original 50- and 100-watt Marshall amps had two channels and four inputs. They lacked master volume controls, so you had to play loud to get them to crunch. Marshall also offered great-sounding 18-watt combos that were based on the Watkins Dominator. I prefer sound of the 1x12 and 2x12 versions to the more ubiquitous 2x10 amp. The 20-watt heads and combos, while employing a different circuit, also sound great. All of the above are highly collectible. The Popular is a 10-watt combo that looks like the 18- and 20-watt combos, and although it's somewhat less desirable, it's still a good-sounding amp. If you are looking for tone, I suggest that you stay away from the Mercury and Specialist combos.

Marshall also made amps under different brand names. The one that had the biggest impact was Park. These amps were made in the Marshall factory by Marshall employees and are basically Marshall amps with a different cosmetic design. Park amps were mainly sold in the U.K. They are highly collectible, with some models commanding higher prices than the equivalent Marshall.

Around 1970, Unicord, Marshall's U.S. distributor, installed 6550 power tubes in the Marshalls they sold here. There were a few reasons for this. Importing amps without tubes meant that they could be labeled as parts, which lowered the import duty rate and, thus, costs. In addition, Unicord discovered that 6550s were more robust than EL34s. This was important because, although early Marshalls had power transformers that worked properly on 110/115 volts, U.S. voltage fluctuates up to 120 volts, which makes the amps operate under more strain. Since Marshall amps were typically cranked all the time, the tubes often failed and took out other components when they did. While the 6550s rarely suffered from this problem, they did sound different. (To my ears, early four-input Marshalls sound better with EL34s.) Unicord stopped using 6550s around 1979, and Marshall went back to installing EL34s at the factory.

For more information on Marshall, refer to *The History of Marshall—The First Fifty Years*, by Michael Doyle and Nick Bowcott. GA

Mitch Colby *helped develop many Marshall and Vox amp designs and is the founder of Colby Amplification.*

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HEIRS TO THE THRONE

Even Better Than the Real Thing

Martin D-28 Authentic 1937

BY CHRIS GILL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

WHILE THE D-18 may be less expensive and the D-45 much more exquisite, the Martin D-28, with its rosewood back and sides and elegantly understated appointments, is the true template for the modern steel-string flattop dreadnought acoustic guitar. Heard on literally thousands of recordings, this model delivers the crisp, ringing tone that most of us instantly associate with the signature Martin sound.

Martin has made many great D-28 guitars since the company refined the 14-fret neck, solid paddle headstock, and square shoulders design in 1934, but most devoted acoustic connoisseurs agree that the D-28s Martin made in 1937 were the company's best. That was the last year that the D-28 featured forward-shifted X bracing, which, along with its hand-scalloped braces, allowed the Adirondack spruce top to project more volume and deliver sweeter, more articulate midrange and treble. Many players also prefer the wider nut width of D-28 guitars produced before 1939, when the width became narrower.

Martin's new D-28 Authentic 1937 guitar accurately reproduces the unique features that made the original 1937 D-28 so highly regarded. The D-28 Authentic 1937 offers the exact same forward-shifted X bracing, complete with Adirondack spruce braces that are carefully scalloped by hand to provide the ideal combination of strength and responsiveness. The neck has a 1937 "barrel & heel" profile (C-shaped around the lower frets, transitioning up the neck to a V-shape) and features an ebony fingerboard that is 1 3/4 inches wide at the nut and decorated with period-correct long-pattern diamonds and squares inlays. Crowning period-correct touches include herringbone purfling surrounding the top and a zigzag center strip.

Like the original 1937 D-28, this new model has a solid top made from the finest available Adirondack red spruce. However, due to current restrictions (and to keep the cost reasonable), the back and sides are solid Madagascar rosewood instead of the Brazilian rosewood back and sides of the original. Martin even used genuine hide glue for the guitar's construction to satisfy the most adamant purists.

The nut and saddle are genuine bone, and the tuners are accurate reproductions of Thirties Waverlys, with nickel-plated "butterbean" buttons. The Delmar tortoiseshell-pattern pickguard and polished-gloss finish with aging toner give the D-28 Authentic 1937 the same warm glow of an aged D-28 that has been kept in immaculate condition.

A single stroke of an open G chord unleashes that familiar vibrant and resonant Martin dreadnought tone heard on countless classic recordings. The midrange is ever-so-slightly scooped, allowing the bass to make its sonorous presence known without obscuring the finer nuances of its exceptionally sparkling treble. This is the classic Martin sound that many vintage acoustic aficionados have sought for decades yet often found elusive, unless we were fortunate enough to get our hands on a particularly exemplary prewar D-28 from Martin's golden era. In a blind tone test, even the most discriminating listener would not be able to tell the difference between the D-28 Authentic 1937's Madagascar rosewood and an original D-28 with Brazilian rosewood.

Fingerstylists and flatpickers alike will love the wider nut, which provides more space between each string and makes it easier to finger chords and single-note lines with precision. While Martin's craftsmen during the Thirties were certainly not slouches, the overall feel of the guitars they made back then could vary dramatically from one example to the next. That is not the case here, as the example Martin sent us for evaluation had the same comfortable playability as another example we found at a Manhattan retailer's shop. The neck is slim, but it still has enough substance to guarantee robust tone and solid reliability.

This may be considered heresy, but it can be argued that the D-28 Authentic 1937 is the best D-28 that Martin has ever produced, thanks both to its dead-on accurate reproduction of the original version's tone and the improved consistency and overall quality of its construction.

LIST PRICE $8,499
C.F. Martin & Co., martinguitars.com

MY FAVORITE YEAR Fred Greene, chief product officer at C.F. Martin & Co., discusses the D-28 Authentic 1937.

· Why did Martin choose to reproduce a 1937 model D-28 over other years from Martin's "Golden Era"?
We already offered the 1941 D-28 Authentic with the 1 11/16-inch nut width and rear-shifted braces, and we wanted to offer an accurate example of a 14-fret, prewar D-28 with a 1 3/4–inch nut with forward-shifted braces. We could have chosen any year from 1934 to mid 1939 to replicate, but we chose 1937 because we had an example in our museum, and in 1937 we produced more D-28s than any other year between 1934 and '39.

· Is the guitar based on one particular original 1937 D-28 or several different D-28s from that year?
It is based on one particular instrument from our museum. As you know, in 1937 these instruments were truly handmade, and there are some small variations from example to example. In order to avoid any controversy, we decided to focus on one particular instrument.

· How does Madagascar rosewood compare to the original Brazilian rosewood?
Visually the woods are very close. It can be easy to confuse one for the other. The Brazilian seems stiffer and denser and this is reflected in the sound. You will hear people describing it as having a "bell-like" ring. It is urgent and responsive. The Madagascar sounds more round and less brash compared against the Brazilian. Tonally, Madagascar fits nicely between Brazilian and Indian Rosewood. Of course this is all a generalization, as there are so many factors that affect the way a guitar sounds.

Return of the Native

2015 Alfa Romeo 4C

BY MIKE DALY

FOR MOST CASUAL auto enthusiasts in America, Alfa Romeo begins and ends with the Duetto driven by Dustin Hoffman in the 1967 film classic *The Graduate*. Alfa Romeo altered that model's design only minimally in the range of Spiders sold over the course of the next two and a half decades, at which point the company unceremoniously bowed out of the American market. However, for serious car enthusiasts Alfa means so much more, a heritage-rich classic Italian manufacturer that can lay claim to some of history's most fascinating automobiles.

Recently, the company has produced mostly nondescript utilitarian compact cars for the European mass market, but in 2003 Alfa flirted with its glorious past with the 8C Competizione, a mid/rear-mounted V-8 supercar eventually produced in a limited quantity of 500 examples and priced at $250,000. Recognizing that a more affordable sports car would do far more for Alfa's long-range business plan, in 2011 the company introduced a downsized version of the 8C that was similarly styled but featured an inline four-cylinder motor.

The aptly named 4C was the darling of auto shows and magazines, almost universally praised for its dynamic styling, mid-rear-engine architecture, and presumably affordable price tag. As the accolades poured on over the next two years, however, one nagging issue remained: the car never made it into production. This potentially game-changing sports car, backed by decades of racing DNA, dangled tantalizingly just out of reach, with little indication of when it would become available for U.S. buyers.

As it turns out, Alfa's protracted return to the American market was all part of parent Fiat's master plan to rebrand the company in tighter sync with its other performance holdings, Abarth and Maserati. Utilizing the Chrysler-affiliated dealer network that provided a launch pad for the now-ubiquitous Fiat 500, and tapping Maserati to conduct the actual factory construction of the Alfa-designed car, Fiat is finally offering the 4C to consumers.

Now hitting American showrooms a year after its European launch, the 4C exudes a build philosophy that makes no bones about its intentions. Just traversing the impossibly wide side sills to gain access to the car, sitting in the unforgiving floor-mounted composite buckets seats, and absorbing the gaggle of carbon fiber throughout the minimal interior quickly clarifies that the 4C is a performance car at the cost of almost all else.

Stripping weight to improve performance is hardly a new approach, but the 4C takes this concept to even greater heights, lacking a glove box, door compartments, interior armrests, or an antenna. However, this is one case where less truly is more.

The 4C's narrow waistline is quite evident as the nimble machine rips through curves with a laughably negligible moment of inertia. Alfa claims its new model is one of the lightest production cars made, and at a dry weight of 1,973 pounds, that is probably true. To provide a frame of reference, Ferrari's track-prepared 458 Speciale weighs in at 2,844 pounds, while the Lotus Exige V6 Cup (much closer to the 4C in power and dimensions) bulges, relatively speaking, at 2,447 pounds.

The 4C's diminutive weight is impressive only if the car has some punch, of course, and the Alfa delivers in that regard as well. The transversely mid/rear-mounted, 1,750cc aluminum inline four-cylinder engine, visible through vented Plexiglas, is turbocharged to produce 237 horsepower at 6,000 rpm, with as much as 80 percent of its 258 pound-

feet of torque available as low as 1,800 rpm. The whining motor gets to its 6,500-rpm redline in quite a hurry, and one quickly learns to tug the paddle-shifted dual-clutch six-speed gearbox into second at about 4,000 rpm, just as the turbo rush seemingly instantaneously pushes the digital tachometer needle to redline. All said and done, the 4C hits 62 mph from standstill in 4.5 seconds, with a top speed of 160 mph.

Like most of today's premium sports cars, the 4C offers multiple drive modes that accentuate either performance or fuel efficiency, with Dynamic, Natural, and All-Weather modes neatly spelling out *D N A*—about the only feature in this mega car that comes across as more cute than competition worthy. Mind you, there's nothing cute about the car's performance in Dynamic mode or the hidden Alfa Race mode, a fourth option initiated by holding down the selector for five full seconds. Dropping nearly all of the electronic assists in the car's stability-control systems, this mode is intended for track use only and includes a Launch feature for optimal explosion off the pole.

Further proof of the 4C's performance mandate is evident in the extremely minimal rear trunk space (the front compartment is sealed and inaccessible), unassisted mechanical steering, and floor-mounted aluminum pedals that delightfully pop up when one's foot slides off. It's rare to find so many pure performance features in a car priced under $55,000, although one can quickly discern that minimal active suspension tuning is one reason why this car costs a third as much as offerings from Ferrari or Maserati, whose dampers stiffen when someone so much as sneezes 50 feet ahead.

From its tiny boot to its spartan interior, the Alfa Romeo 4C is pure performance car.

Such modestly engineered connectivity to the road highlights the 4C's authenticity, from the low rumble of its inline-four at idle to the expressive way it rips out of curves at speed. A car like this could never be all things to everyone, but for the driving purist who values a good slalom and whose commuter needs are already covered, the 4C is an unadulterated blast. It's also a clear indication that Alfa Romeo's return to sports car manufacture is no mere marketing ploy.

MSRP Base, $53,900; as tested, $60,195
Alfa Romeo, alfaromeo.com

Concertmaster

Montarado Custom Guitars Viola Model

BY PAUL RIARIO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

IN STRING QUARTET circles, humor abounds over how the modest viola plays second fiddle to the more glamorous violin. For example: "Why did the violist marry the guitarist?" "Upward mobility." But all joking aside, I can attest that a marriage between these two instruments has its advantages. For proof, look no further than the Montarado Custom Guitars Viola Model, a perfect and musically satisfying union of a viola and an archtop electric guitar.

Luthier Kelley Meyer handcrafts the Viola using classic violin construction techniques. His workshop is in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where high elevation and dry climate contribute to the sonorous voice of this exquisite instrument. The Viola features a tightly grained German spruce top with dual f-holes and a beautiful flame-maple arched back. What's unique is how the edges of both the top and back protrude over the sides, similar to how bowed instruments are crafted for volume projection. The sunburst finish is a light, thin varnish like that of a classical stringed instrument. Strings are top loaded into brass inserts on the suspended ebony tailpiece and guided over the custom-machined ebony bridge. The Viola's three-piece flame-maple neck is reinforced with dual carbon-fiber rods for strength, and instead of a typical neck heel, the guitar has a conical neck pocket with a double-sliding dovetail joint that keeps it firmly in place. The ebony fingerboard features 22 jumbo frets, and—as a signature touch—a mountain design inlay at the guitar's 12th fret reflects the guitar's rugged Colorado origins.

The Viola appears delicate, but the guitar is designed to handle plenty of high volume and muscular playing styles. Despite its compact Tele-like proportions, its archtop hollowbody design is impressively loud and resonant. The guitar's Benedetto Jazz humbuckers provide a rainbow of full-bodied electric tones, and built-in piezo electronics deliver natural acoustic tones that can be blended with the electric sound. The six-position toggle switch engages a surprising range of usable coil-split, series, and parallel tones. You can easily coax great midrange honk for blues or tame it down for jazzy bass-heavy tones.

In the vast world of custom guitars, the Montarado Viola is in a class by itself. It has all the sex appeal of a rock guitar but with the added elegance of an archtop design. While the Viola may not sit comfortably in a traditional string ensemble, its wide variety of alluring tones is like an orchestra all to itself.

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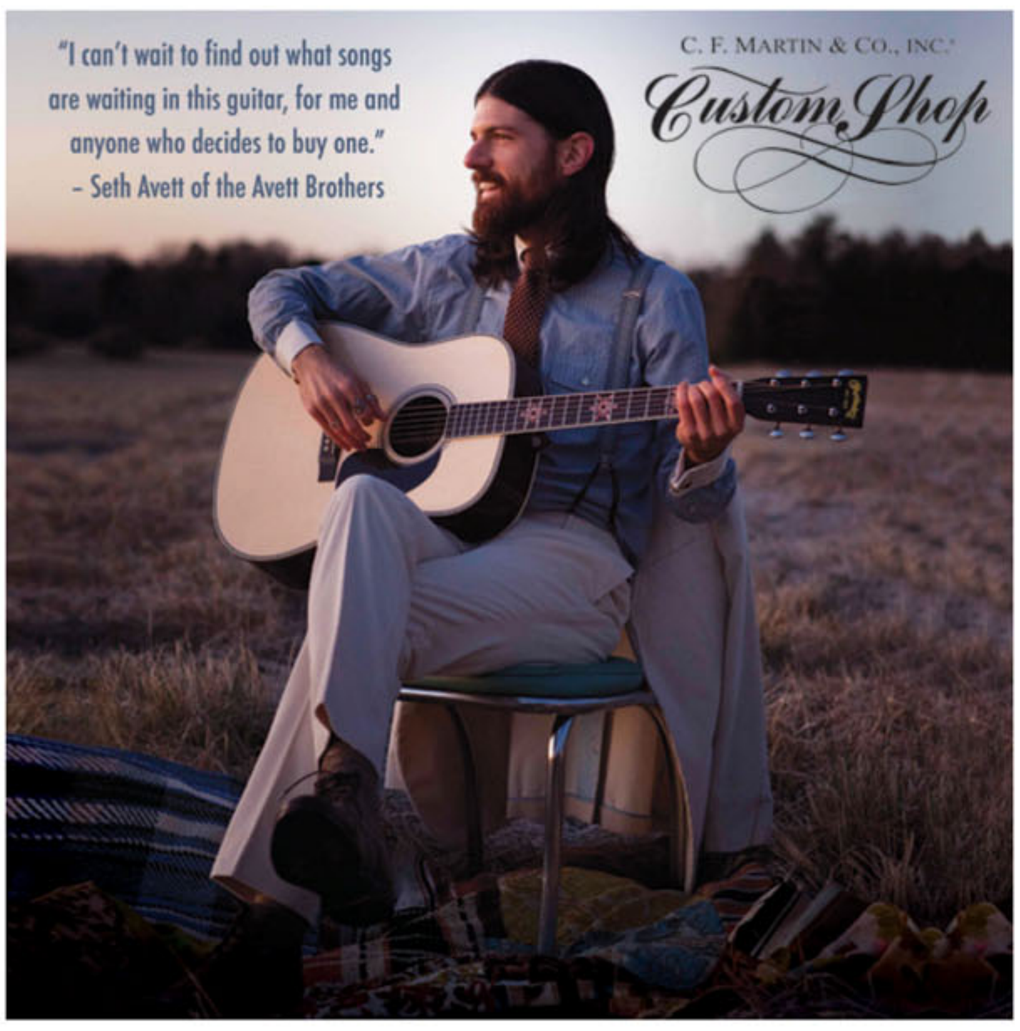

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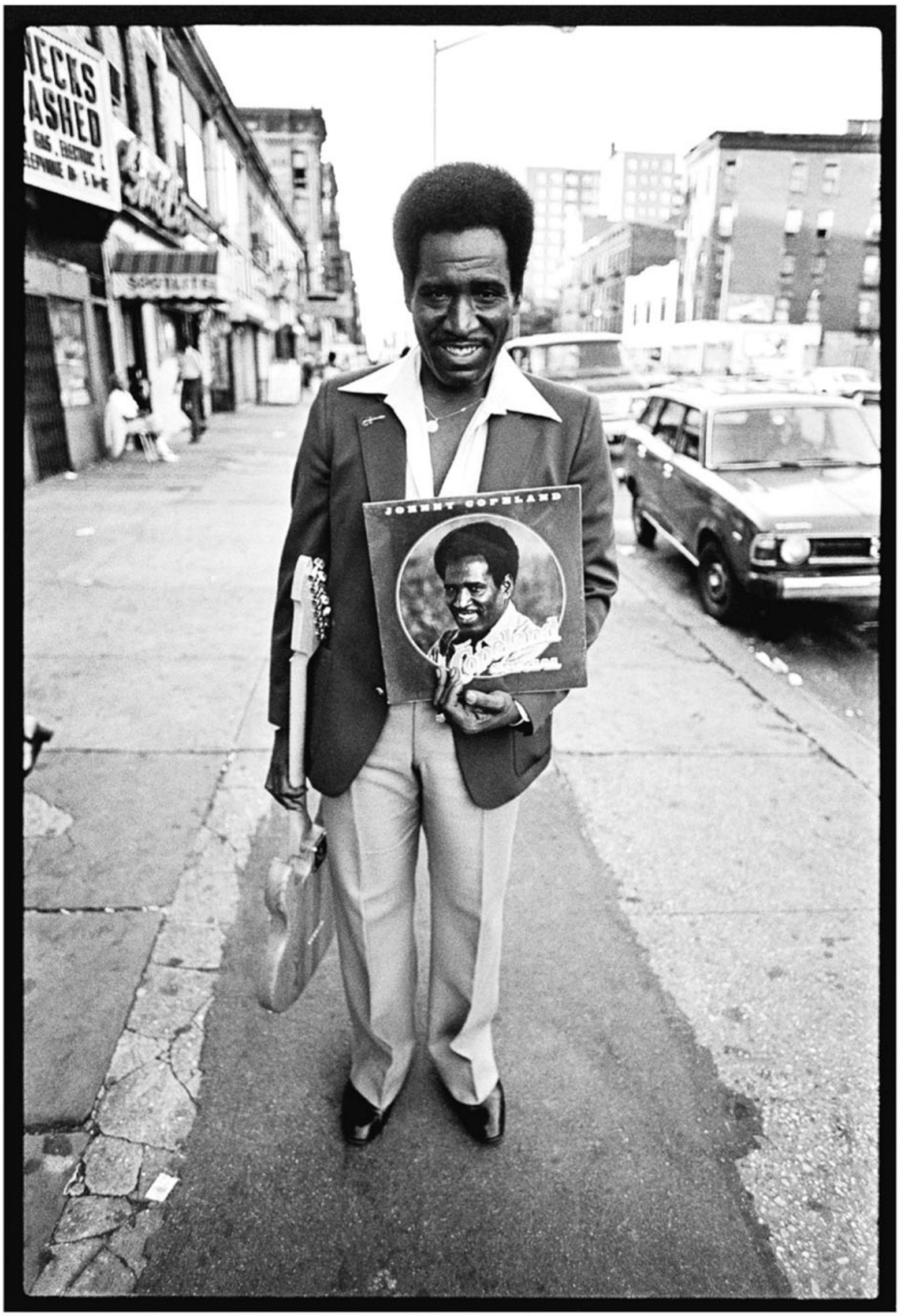

Making Tracks

JOHNNY COPELAND FINDS HIS FEET IN NEW YORK CITY.

THE LATE BLUESMAN Johnny Copeland was on the cusp of a career resurgence when Deborah Feingold shot this photo of him in 1981 on 125th Street in his Harlem neighborhood. Copeland had relocated from Houston to New York City in the Seventies to rethink his future. At the time of this photo, he had just cut his debut album, *Copeland Special*, which he's holding in the photo. It was the first of seven discs he recorded for Rounder Records, and it established him internationally as a blues star. Feingold's photo captures him full of optimism and pride.

"I had the pleasure of shooting Johnny several times, and he was one of the kindest men that I ever worked with," Feingold says. "There was a deepness behind those eyes—a full range of emotions on display that I don't always have with other people and that I really wanted to capture."

For the session, she and Copeland took a stroll with no purpose beyond being somewhere he was familiar and comfortable. He brought along a copy of *Copeland Special* and his Peavey T60 guitar, which he was proud to have received as an endorsee.

"There was a young girl who had some sort of relationship with him, and I believe she carried the guitar and handed it to him," Feingold says. "My main thing was to capture his depth and soul, and it just came together in this shot." —*Alan Paul*

Signed, limited-edition fine-art prints of this photo—and additional images by Deborah Feingold and other photographers—are available at rockpaperphoto.com.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **DEBORAH FEINGOLD**

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